My Ordeal With

# The Quran and Allah

Abbas Abdul Noor

Translated By

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Translator's Note:

There are very few books by Muslims that analyse the Qurʾān in a truly critical way—and even fewer written in Arabic by Arabs. This book is important because it breaks that ground and removes that barrier. Until now, it has not been translated into English.

The book has been available in Arabic for about ten years in PDF form. The first page identifies the text as a draft copy, indicating that it was not finalised for printing. Comments on the internet indicate that the book was refused publication in Egypt and other Arab countries, which is not unexpected given the difficulty of publishing critical commentary on the Qurʾān in such regions. Beneath the words "Draft Copy," it says: "Damanhur, Arab Republic of Egypt, 2004."

Apart from the biographical details given by the book itself, little is known about its author. The text identifies the author by the name "Abbas Abdul Noor." It seems likely that this name is an alias used to conceal the author's identity due to fear of repercussions from publishing such a forthright analysis.

The Arabic text demonstrates the author's deep knowledge of the Qurʾān and the hadith, which is reflected by his use of numerous allusions and references that may be difficult for the non-Muslim to grasp. I have added many footnotes to explain and cite these references so that readers who may be less familiar with the Qurʾān will nonetheless be able to follow the author's arguments and observations.

The reader will immediately notice the book's distinctive style and language, which is complex and poetic. Arabic, like all languages, reflects the culture and mentality that is particular to the peoples who speak the language and their unique history. Translating any work is always a challenge, but it is particularly difficult to translate an Arabic book like this into English.

The book is written in the classical Arabic style that crystallised during the flowering of Arabic literature. This style may appear somewhat over-elaborate and flowery for English, and so I was tempted to translate it into a less literal form. But I finally opted for a fairly straightforward translation that gives the reader a more faithful representation of the Arabic style. This helps convey the author's perspective on the Qurʾān as an Arab Muslim, and communicates his personal journey and insights.

About the Translator:

My father was Egyptian, and my mother was English. I was born as a Muslim, and at the age of 19 I became very devout and committed to Islam. For the next 30 years, Islam guided every aspect of my life.

I completed a BA in Arabic and Islamic Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, where I became President of the Islamic Society. After leaving university, I became Amir of a Da'wah group in North London with my brother, and edited an Islamic magazine called "The Clarion." I wrote four books for Muslim children, and spent fifteen years as a teacher at Islamia School, which was founded by Yusuf Islam (Cat Stevens).

Around the age of 48, however, I began to suffer a serious crisis of faith. I started to question the beliefs that I had, for so long, taken for granted, and I started to look at Islam in a new light. This period of loss of faith lasted about 7 years. During this time, I learned a great deal about myself. Yes, I did have many doubts, and yes, there were things I couldn't believe—but at the same time, I did believe in God, and I felt far more comfortable identifying as a Muslim than as an ex-Muslim.

I now use the label "Agnostic Muslim" because it embraces both my doubts and my faith. I believe and hope that there is something more than this material existence of ours. At the same time, however, I remain incurably skeptical. I believe it is impossible to prove or disprove the existence of God, but I nevertheless have faith, and I hope that there is something…call it God, if you will.

I identify with Islam because it is the religious tradition I grew up with, and I am familiar and comfortable within. It shaped me for half a century, and continues to be an important part of my life. I am able to express my spirituality through Islam. I instinctively reference sayings from the Qurʾān and Sunna, and I find comfort in prayer and fasting.

But I do not suppress reason in favour of dogma. I take that which I find valuable, and ignore that which I do not. I do this because I believe the Qurʾān is not infallible, but is a fallible human work. Although I believe Muhammad was inspired by God to utter the words of the Qurʾān, I believe this inspiration came through the mind and person of Muhammad, and that it was he who interpreted this inspiration according to his time, culture, and personality. He composed the words and phrased the sentences.

As a result, I believe that while the Qurʾān contains a great deal of wisdom, it is inextricably tied to its context and environment. Most important of all, it is fallible. While the Qurʾān is a source of inspiration, it must be subject it to human reason—and not the other way around.

- Hassan Radwan

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# Foreword

Abbas Abdul Noor was born in Damanhur in 1927. He was a Sufi Sheikh, a pious Muslim of the Sunni creed, a jurist, and a principal of a Sufi lodge (تكيّة). He inherited knowledge of the religion from his forefathers and ancestors, who were recognised for their piety, strength of doctrine, and righteousness. In his city, he led his followers (murids/religious pupils of a Sufi path) upon the path of true faith and devotion to worship.

As a young man, he enrolled in the Faculty of Theology at Al Azhar, where he studied for three years. He decided to complete the fourth year at the University of Fuad I, where he studied under intellectual titans such as Abdel Rahman Badawi, Zaki Naguib Mahmoud, Muhammed Abdul Hadi Abu Reeda, Ahmad Fuad Al-Ahwani, Yusuf Murad, and others.

After completing his degree, he was awarded a scholarship from the Department of Islamic Endowments to study in Paris at the Sorbonne, where he obtained a doctorate in philosophy.

When he returned to his city, he resumed his religious endeavours, and became a preacher, imam, and a speaker in one of its mosques. He then persevered at the local university, teaching and writing erudite philosophical books. He produced a number of publications concerning philosophical, Islamic, and Arabic thought. His works have been reprinted several times in Cairo and Beirut. After he retired, he devoted himself to writing and research in various fields of philosophy, literature, and religion.

But his intellectual life was not without worries, nor was his religious life free of doubts. It is true that he grew up in a pious devout household. Yet he still had misgivings, feelings of inner-turmoil, and endless questions. His mind was raising provocative subjects, but his faith struggled to answer every dilemma.

For Abbas, the conflict between science and religion had started early. It was a conflict that he was unable to make public. If he hadn't had to suppress this conflict when it first arose, he would not have reached the degree of indignation that he expresses in this book. If he had been allowed to express his mind and heart, he would have reached the same conclusions about his faith, but he would not have expressed them with such intensity and fervour.

Abbas is not responsible for the conclusions he arrived at about the Qur'ān and the God of the Qur'ān. Neither is the Qur'ān or God responsible. It is the adherents—especially the "waffling" Mufassirun—who are responsible for the strange, bizarre view of the Qur'ān and the God of the Qur'ān.

They uprooted the Qur'ān from its environment and presented it to us as an uncreated, eternal, divine text that has no relation to human fallibility, nor any limitations associated with the circumstances of its origins. This is the problem for Dr. Abbas. He wants nothing other than for the Qur'ān to be returned to the course of human history. The Qur'ān is an excellent text for its time, but it is full of mistakes and misguidance when taken out of its time.

We ask the reader to read slowly in order to judge, and to read what the author has gone through, and to let his reason and faith work together. Let the reader know that faith works where reason doesn't, but not without it.

- M. H.

# Chapter One: My Journey from Faith to Doubt

*Introduction:*

This book is an emphatic and unambiguous call for a rereading of the Qur'ān in order to understand it as it should be understood. It is a call to break the shackles and chains that have distorted our thinking and corrupted our understanding of life, the universe, and our destiny in it. It has forced us to see the universe and life from a single, narrow ideological perspective. Whereas in earlier centuries, the Qur'ān was a source of progress and building, it has today become a source of backwardness and ruin. It has become dead weight that lies heavily upon our minds and souls.

This book is an earnest critical attempt to liberate and emancipate us from those immovable and unshakable presuppositions that have led us into the crisis we face today. It is an attempt to shine a light of hope onto our current dark state. I have supported it with evidence from the Qur'ānic text, along with criticisms and analyses of its verses in an attempt to lift the veils that obscure our vision—nay, that have blinded it. They have paralysed our ability to think freely, anaesthetised our faculties, and killed the free spirit and innovator within us. They have turned our intellectual gifts into something negative, and caused us to have no ambition or concern apart from preserving the past, justifying and defending the "holy" text, and immersing ourselves in its profound and hidden wisdoms and "treasures."

I wrote this book with a sincere heart that yearns for change, one that seeks to motivate us to take up this challenge and work towards a profound shift that shakes our old ways to their cores. As a consequence, I want to present a view of the Qur'ān that is different from the well-known picture that is passed around amongst the common people, and also different from those of the select, and even the select of the select, because, in fact, the level of reverence, devotion, and prostration to the text is often no different coming from a common man than it is from a great scholar. How many giants of Arabic literature grovel in front of the Qur'ānic text to the extent that they appear like a dwarf, trembling and terrified, or like a mouse that has seen the spectre of a cat? This is how it has left many a giant of Arabic literature, fooled by the lion's roar that wards off all those who dare to peek behind.

My sole intention in writing this book is to storm this lion's lair that guards the text of the Qur'ān. First and foremost, we must tear away the layer of sanctity and holiness that surrounds this text. Without doing so, it will be impossible to properly study the text. We must disrobe the text, see it naked, and question its sanctity. We must apply the methodology of reason to the text. It is only through this process that new horizons will open themselves up to us. Horizons that those whose eyes are veiled with the holiness of the text can never hope to reach, for they are idol worshippers. There is no difference between those who worship statues and those who worship the text.

We must reconsider the distinction we have created between the sacred and the profane; that which is profane is not necessarily impure. We must reconsider the claim that there is a rivalry between them, for there is nothing sacred but humanity, and the mind which distinguishes man from other creatures. For that reason, the holiness and sanctity of the text must not distract us from bold and vigorous rational analysis. Rational analysis is

about activity and stimulation. It is about using one's abilities, and being courageous, and facing the facts regardless of fear, apprehension, and unease.

The supremacy and dominance of religion over thought and culture confiscates reason, isolating it from reality and from the life of man. Because of this confiscation of reason and the knowledge that reason produces, Arab culture appears as though it has nothing to do with life, except that which concerns the next life and all it contains of bliss, Hell, houris, and fruit from that which they desire.

The time has come for us to climb over the walls built around us as a result of the confiscation of reason. There is no other way to do this other than by starting a revolution of understanding, a revolution in our perceptions and most basic assumptions of the texts and readings. It must be a revolution that will come from seeing the texts in a new way, and treating them as we would treat any object that is subject to analysis and reason.

There are open horizons that lie before reason if we treat the Qur'ān as a text that is open to rational study and reevaluation. If we don't do this, the text will remain dominating and immovable, as "no-one can change his words." The old perceptions will remain fixed, limiting us, holding us prisoner and holding us back.

Identity is not something that simply corresponds to a past glory, formed at one moment in history and remaining like that forever. It is an ongoing process of constant reinvention. Man moulds his own identity and creates it. He forms his own ideas, concepts, and systems with which to live his life. Identity is about living life, while the "holy" text is about stagnation and imitation.

How can we allow life to be held hostage by any text? Identity gives birth to the future, while the text returns us to the museum of the past. How can the future be made to go back to the past? Identity is a promise on its way to achievement, while the text is like handcuffs that obstruct every achievement. How can achievement and non-achievement be reconciled? Slavish devotion to the text undermines the dynamism of man, the gaining of knowledge, and the progress of history. So choose for yourself that which is good; the free one and the one in the dark are not equal!

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We must not remain imprisoned in this dark, cramped room while the world around us marches on, growing and evolving without us. We must throw open the curtains and go out into the light. We must rediscover the spirit of dynamism and enterprise that we had before retreating to this time capsule and locking the door behind us. We must stop blindly following the dictates of the text and start using the light of reason we have been blessed with so that we can start engaging with and living in reality. We must make a positive contribution to the world and spread light. How long are we going to remain here, taking pleasure by being in this gloomy room, chained with the shackles of darkness, refusing to see the light?!

It seems to have escaped our notice that texts have a time limit, after which point they become dated and obsolete. When its time comes, it should give way to others. We should not try to distort the text's place and twist the neck of time to extend its life, ignoring the calls demanding it move aside. We must learn how to perform the delicate operation of liberating ourselves from the yoke of the texts after centuries of its rule and supremacy over us. We must

break its continuing emotional hold as it evokes feelings of nostalgia for the glorious past, filled with the texts and those who worship the texts.

Certain texts that have no meaning for us today delighted and enriched our ancestors yesterday. They discovered in them spiritual ecstasy that knew no bounds. It is hard for us to understand this today, but they eagerly engaged in competition to outdo one another, shoving and jostling each other, to discover the pearls of wisdoms that the book of God contained. This is a bygone age.

Our grandfathers devoted themselves to studying the Qur'ān. It was a study full of invention, concoction, and artefact. They ascribed to the Qur'ān eloquence, clarity, and miraculousness that it did not merit. They wrestled from it meanings, intentions, and purposes that never occurred to its author. They spread around it processions of images, colours, imaginary beings, and gloss that no other book has been granted.

This is what faith does to those who worship the text and delusions. But the monuments, divination, and idols all came tumbling down, and so shall the texts in their wake. Humanity has changed with the changing of time. The period of the Caliphate is over. Their time has passed, and a new time has come.

The Arabic Qur'ān has been credited with an unparalleled unique and mythical character. They made it live outside of history, while events around it bustle with change. I wonder when it will emerge from this dark tunnel to enter the courtyard of history, for the words of a bygone era do not build the future. Only that which is aware of our present challenges can help us.

The tyranny of the text has prevailed over every attempt at a renaissance—even the dream of a renaissance—so that all efforts to produce one came to nothing, and all of our hopes of achieving a plan for a renaissance are dashed. Instead, we have seen that the Salafis, the fundamentalists, the bloodthirsty and the regressive have all conspired to throttle the tentative breaths of any renaissance, and disabled all initiatives that might lead to one.

It is a pity that the march of history never sleeps or stands still, except in our countries. And what can I say? Even in many Third World countries, we see the march of progress and movement. Almost the whole world is moving forward like a surging river, even if, at times, with choppy waters. The exceptions are our countries, where there is a still lake, stagnant and unmoving. I have no other objective or motive in this book other than to throw a stone into this lake so that, perhaps, it might make it stir, disrupting its calmness and composure.

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The scent of an intense revolution emanates from the depths of this book: a powerful desire for change, a fundamental challenge to the traditional approach to life that fears its course and its twists and turns. It is an ardent aspiration that is reiterated on every page.

This book contains a lot of berating and slaps in the face, but even more tears and sorrow, for it is a screaming summons to take life earnestly and to work together to rectify our reality, our history, and our humanity. If we are not truly determined to face the challenge and to confront the bitter reality we find so difficult to acknowledge and accept, then we share in perpetuating our backwardness rather than trying to end it.

The book that is in front of you requires that you suffer some pain, and that you persevere with reflection and introspection. It may strain your nerves, frighten you, and anger you. At the very least, it will trigger instinctive defensive mechanisms.

The Qur'ān has become a stumbling block, an impregnable barrier in the face of every attempt at a renaissance or progress. I am only saying the truth, and I come to you with clear authority. So whoever wills, let him believe, and whoever wills, let him disbelieve, for I am not a guardian over you. I have delivered the message and fulfilled the trust, so bear witness, and I am with you among the witnesses.[1] So what do you say?

We talk a great deal about that which is of no use to us, and yet we are silent about that which is. I want to articulate those things we are afraid to say. I have not written this other than with good intentions and the longing for us to be better. I am even prepared to die for the sake of the change we need.

The image I present in this book is different from the images passed around the "marketplace." I want to build a new mentality on the ruins of the prevailing mentalities. I want to plant the seed of free, independent, secular thought that doesn't fear the making of sacrifices. I want to create a heated atmosphere of questioning around the tragedy of our state, around the roots of the sickness, and around the medicine that we need.

I am not asking the reader to blindly accept what I say, even though I am quite certain of it, and have calculated and placed every word in its right place. It is up to the reader to judge what I write and say for himself.

This book is aimed firstly at my own people, the Arabs. I don't want to just hurl them into the stream of modernity, but into its raging furnace, for streams do not purify—in fact, they may be polluted. But the raging furnace cleanses all impurities. Fire is the greatest cleanser. There are no impurities in fire.

While writing this book, I began to think about the risk I was taking, and began to wonder and question myself as I worked amid a growing sense of the dangers that should not be absent from the mind and spirit of the wise. This book confronts myths that people hold dear.

But is it to God I should complain, when God does not feed the hungry, nor help the needy, nor take pity on the oppressed, nor cure the sick? So, I wonder, will He respond to the indolent whose senses are dulled, like us? Indeed, the pious are more worthy of reply than us. Despite that, He doesn't reply to them. So what do you think about the wicked, if God actually exists? If He doesn't, then it is all the same.

If God really does exist, there would be some evidence or trace of Him in the world around us, which appears to run by itself as if He does not. They say man is born with an innate faith in God. Faith is self-evident, which man cannot doubt, and they use this verse as evidence: "Is there any doubt about God, the creator of the heavens and the earth?" (14:10)

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[1] The author frequently references the Qur'ān and plays on Arabic words, which is difficult to translate. I generally refrain from highlighting these instances to avoid overburdening the translation with footnotes. However, as an example, two sentences from this section alone contain five references to the Qur'ān: "For I have come to you with clear authority." (44:19) "The truth is from your Lord, so whoever wills, let him believe and whoever wills, let him disbelieve." (18:29) "I am not a guardian over you." (6:104) "O Messenger! Deliver what has been revealed to you from your Lord" (5:67). There is also reference to hadith of the last sermon: "'By God, have I delivered?' The people replied: 'We bear witness that you have delivered and fulfilled (your duty)…'" as well as another reference to the Qur'ān: "So bear witness, and I am with you among the witnesses." (3:81)

Yes, there are doubts. There are many doubts about God. If the knowledge of God was intrinsic and intuitive with no doubt about it, then it wouldn't require hundreds of thousands of books, philosophies, religions, prophets and miracles to prove His existence. If there was no doubt about God, then no-one would doubt it.

However, this didn't lead me to the truth. I arrived at the truth only through reading the Qur'ān. It was not, however, the reading of a faithful worshipper, which only increases blindness upon blindness, but an analytical reading that looks critically at the structure and composition. A reading that weighs and compares. A reading that doesn't work from the premise of certainty, but from that of doubt, criticism, and appraisal. This way of reading assesses every verse in it and puts it under interrogation, linking it to other verses. It requires cataloging, indexing, and dividing into topics, and attaching every verse to the subject specific to it.

My only reference is the Qur'ān. I did not refer to anything other than it to analyze the Qur'ān. Of course, I wasn't deceived by the sayings and views of the Qur'ānic commentators regarding this or that verse. I am very familiar with their rulings, which I mostly reject. I didn't announce any of the results that I was able to arrive at until I was able to support them with evidence from the required verse together with all other verses similar to it.

It was a truly enjoyable study, and one which led to some very strange results that I didn't expect, even though I had a vague sense of them ever since adolescence, well before the age of twenty, when I was a student in the heyday of my youth and the prime of my life. Whenever I asked my sheikhs about issues that I found with the Qur'ān, they would just refuse such questions and warn me against going astray. If I ever did get some sort of answer from one of them, I sensed an air of affectation and irritation in their words. Despite that, I was Sufi-orientated and of deep faith—oh, the irony—and I would only decide to take on the matter myself much later in life.

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I went through a severe and choking crisis from the beginning of age seventy. It was the starting point for various conflicts that erupted in my soul, and the critical turning point that turned my life upside down. After a great deal of hesitation and even greater anguish, I finally reached a point where I felt I could express some of my feelings and thoughts in words. I said to myself, "Come on, you must do what you need to do. You are on the path to the truth, and the truth is better and more worthy of being followed."

I went to Cairo to carry out my plan for this book, without apprehension or caution or fear, due to the insistence of the enlightened revolutionaries among my companions and friends to do so. I did this despite the storms, adversities, and at the risk of provoking the attack of the wolves. If you want to be a man, you must live in danger. That is the most decisive of speech!

This book is a proposal for the Qur'ānic problem from the perspective of a revolutionary. But it is not the final say, nor is it the last word, or even a complete view. It is only an effort to stir dissension and controversy, and should be added to other books that have stirred dissent and controversy to be hurled along with stones into the stagnant waters. I hope that it will open the door a little for more efforts to follow, better and bolder in their dissent, supported with evidence, explanations, and comprehensive analysis. I hope for it to be the basis for a critical, rational awareness, and a program to work towards a brighter and better future for us.

And now, the book has reached its time; I hand it over to you. May it light up its way, and meet its destiny alone in a world fraught with conflict and power struggles. If you find in this book anything that displeases you, I ask

you to please forgive me. I only want to do good, and I hand my affairs over to history, which will sooner or later judge me.

Finally, here is the book. Take care of it, and farewell!

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I am in the confessional booth. He who sits in this booth must recount everything, whether good or bad. I have abided by this rule quite literally during the writing of this book. I titled this chapter "My Journey from Faith to Doubt" as a response to an amusing book written for the common man, whose author believed that he had achieved the height of his aspirations, and completely silenced every single doubter and all of the great skeptics throughout history with his book, *My Journey from Doubt to Faith*[2]. Welcome to this journey, by which matters are put into perspective, and rights are returned to where they belong!

It is my duty since the beginning, and before everything else, to bring to the reader's attention to my upbringing and inner thoughts since my adolescence, and even before then, until I passed my thirties. The reader will then be able to share in my confusion, struggles, and understand the burning in my soul.

I grew up as a zealous young Muslim, spending my developing years in the bosom of Islamic learning. It was my ambition—nay, my dream—to become a preacher of Islam in India. When I think about that now, I cannot fathom why I chose India over all other places to bestow the gift of Islam upon![3]

I immersed myself in religion from head to toe. I would spend all my spare time in prayer and worship and attending "thikr" circles (religious gatherings where the names of God and pious prayers and phrases are recited together as a group, which is led by the sheikh). I would only leave one Islamic lecture or sermon in a mosque in order to attend another one, so that I could gather knowledge from all angles and from the correct places, and so that I could be a good example and a role model for others.

After the death of my father, I suffered the misfortune of having to study under a group of scholars in al-Madinah so as to preserve the "sacred knowledge" (العلم الشريف) that I had inherited from my father and a long line of Sheikhs (Sufi orders generally have long "chains" of teachers who pass on knowledge from one to another). It was feared that this knowledge might be lost to my family, which had been its guardian for the last 500 years, at least. So, I took on the whole of my duty in preaching, guiding, ordering good and forbidding evil. I did this especially at Friday prayers and all the religious festivals, and even on some non-religious occasions.

With me ended the pious ancestors, for I was the last in the chain of servants of the "sacred knowledge" in my family. I was the last fruit of the tree which for so long provided Damanhur with scholars, fuqaha, preachers,

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[2] By Mustafa Mahmoud.

[3] The term the author uses for Islam is لحنيفية البيضاء Al-Haneefiyya Al-Bayda: the Pure-White Haneefism. Traditionally, the Haneefs were believed to be those pre-Islamic Arabs who rejected polytheism and followed the 'pure' faith of Abraham. The Qur'ān refers to Abraham as a 'Haneef,' or of pure faith. Thus, the word Haneefiyya has come to mean Islam itself, i.e. the pure unadulterated monotheism of Abraham. However, this term Al-Haneefa Al-Bayda' is also from a line of poetry by Salih ben Sharif al-Rundi, lamenting the fall of Al-Andalus (Islamic Spain), usually translated as the white marble ablution fountains of which Al-Andalus is famous: "The tap of the white ablution fount weeps in despair, like a passionate lover weeping at the departure of the beloved." This reference is also no doubt intended, since Islamic Spain is frequently evoked to re-awaken Muslims to the spirit of Da'wah (spreading the message of Islam), and the dangers of failing in this duty.

judges, Imams and authors in the many "wirds" (Sufi gatherings where portions of the Qur'ān are read along with the chanting of the names of God with various prayers and invocations) and "thikr" gatherings, and many other gatherings where religious knowledge was shared. However, it doesn't appear that anyone from my family is eager to repair that chain that ended with me. Indeed, religion has become stale goods these days—and I seek refuge with God most High!

Then, to cap it all, I joined al-Azhar, The Most Luminous (الأنور), and received the "sacred" knowledge in it. Oh, how many times they pursued me there and insisted on the necessity of wearing the turban and the kaftan! God be praised. How long I suffered them both while adorning them with a thick beard and a scary face! I do, however, have some fond memories of my sheikhs and old colleagues, the flowers of al-Azhar—may God be pleased with them and benefit us by their baraka. They were the treasure of treasures. The heart and the soul.

But the truth is that I was mostly very disappointed with the studies at al-Azhar. For that reason, I decided to leave in the third year, a year before my graduation. I wasn't sorry. Many advised me at the time to complete my drama-filled, ill-fated studies in order to obtain my diploma in empty disputations and meaningless discourses and contentions. They said that, with that diploma, I could enter the third year in the Faculty of Literature at King Fuad I University (now known as Cairo University).

That was in the early 40's, during the time of Sheikh Mustafa al-Maraghi. But I had had enough of their studies to the extent that I couldn't take any more. I had wasted three years of my life for nothing. So why add a fourth year for no other reason than to obtain an elegantly-printed, colourful document that, though visually pleasing, would be of worthless import, useless content, and meagre substance? It would constantly remind me of the wasted days and empty times, of frustrated hopes and extreme misery.

So it was a divorce of three pronouncements, and we went our separate ways, even though I was affiliated with the highest faculty of Azhar's faculties at the time, and they were the closest to my soul. It was the faculty of Usul al-Din in Shubra…but al-Azhar is al-Azhar!

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*The Belief Phase:*

On my face is the mark that one cannot miss.[4] It is the first of my features that stands out. It is that feature that the Noble Qur'ān refers to when it says, "Their mark is on their faces from the trace of prostration." It sums up a lifetime of prayer, tahajjud, tears, reverence, worship, repentance, seeking forgiveness, striving, and self-accounting.

I used to take great solace from prayer; it was my very lifeblood. In it, I could open my heart, bare my soul, and comfort my spirit. My heart was deeply attached to God: it was never inattentive of Him, unable to bear parting from Him, and always poised to receive His light.

[4] This mark is believed by many to be a visible mark on the forehead that appears due to the friction from repeatedly prostrating in prayer.

Indeed, I loved the spirit of mysticism and devotional gatherings that embodies Sufism. I felt that they carried me to the outermost heights of ecstasy, where I could glimpse a vision of the heavenly kingdom. These were as blessed moments that I could snatch from the depths of time. When in this state, I felt I was embraced by an overwhelming sensation that eloquence cannot convey, that ties the tongue and causes words to stumble on the lips.

I have vainly tried to pierce through this brilliant light that explodes all things, or to become one with it, or to just be an atom in that glistening silver, that pearly white star.[5] There, pure crystal lakes fill open horizons. Soft, from its apex, a river cascades, sparkling with light, acting as a mirror in which one could not only see one's face, but the universe and time. The processions of ages and epochs.

In this radiant arena, I stand dazed and bewildered. I am filled with feelings of overwhelming heartbreak and sorrow, for I am neither an artist nor a poet that could record what I am experiencing of euphoria and joy. But who knows? Perhaps even if I had been an inspired poet, the right words that I spent years mastering would still have been hard to find, and would have slipped away in a moment.

It is no wonder, for perhaps it was the nature of that pure, spiritual beauty, that timeless and heavenly vision, to leave me tongue-tied, about which the most eminent doctors could do nothing. In fact, this is what happened in reality, for there is that which no eye has seen, nor ear heard; there is that which has never occurred to the mind of man. And many of the things that do occur to the mind of man defy description. So what about those things that cannot occur to the mind, which are not within his sphere of knowledge or understanding? In short, those spiritual states (حالات) that manifested themselves to me in moments of ecstasy are not things that occur to any rational mind, so he who seeks to express them is seeking the impossible!

The ecstatic state would only last a few moments, and then I would soon recover my senses. I would wake up from my state as though I had fainted, and my foot would slip as I got up from my place. The real world would appear as though it was reflected by a rusty mirror, as though it were full of wickedness. This divine beauty that I had witnessed had pierced my heart and returned me to the pure nature with which God had created me, and had thrust me back to the pristine nature by the way of the horizons that are open to Sufism and the world of the soul. With all of this came humility, tears, seclusion and self-denial, the immersion of the heart in the remembrance of God, and the emptying oneself of worldly pursuits.

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Thus began my Sufi journey, and I set out with wholehearted commitment and all my energy upon the road of the "difficult choice." For he who desires the next life and strives for it as he should strive, let him take the path of Tasawuf (Sufism). For the Sufis, as Al-Ghazali said[6], are those who tread the path of God uniquely. My soul was intoxicated with the love of God, dizzy with its fragrance. All I wanted was to achieve closeness to God and be blessed enough to meet Him. There was no truth, nor goodness, nor beauty, nor beloved other than God. Everything

[5] In this passage, the author is describing his ecstatic experiences as a follower of a Sufi Tariqa. The phrase "Pearly white star" is from Qur'ān 24:35 - the famous "Verse of Light" that describes God as enclosed within layer upon layer of light. It is much loved by Sufis and Muslim mystics. The faithful at thikr gatherings seek to lose themselves in the light of God and achieve - even for a moment - the ideal of Fana', which is "destroying/dissolving" the self and then ultimately Baqa', "remaining" i.e. being part of the Eternal One, other than which nothing exists.

[6] *The Saviour from Error and the Joiner to the Might of the Magnificent* by Al-Ghazali, page 103.

apart from Him (Glory be to Him) is a trace of His traces, perfume from the scent of His bounty, an atom from the treasures of His power, and a sparkle from the lights of His presence.

Intellect is lost in the oceans of His glory, and the mind is bewildered in the glitter of His beauty. He is hidden from sight, and yet apparent in the clarity of His effects. Manifested to perceptions, and yet He is "The Hidden" (الباطن) in the mysteries of His wisdoms and the secrets of His perfection. There is nothing that does not sing His praises nor celebrate His remembrance, for God has inspired all of His creatures to glorify Him in the language of the ecstatic state (الحال) if they cannot do it in words. For he who is not moved by spring and its flowers, or captivated by the oud and its strings, is one who is deaf, dumb, and blind; his nature is corrupt and incurably sick.

I used to be infatuated with the love of God and the longing to be with Him. I felt the fire of yearning for Him and the flames of adoration for His being. I saw Him in everything. I heard His voice calling me in every place! I knocked at every door in my pursuit to be close to Him and performed every act that would please Him, which entailed utmost piety and sincerity in everything I do as befits Him (Glory be to Him).

I was always engaged in His remembrance: I was seeking Him, beseeching Him, and thanking Him for the blessings, both apparent and hidden. I would repent and ask for forgiveness, I would cry and regret any time I wasted not in His service. I would constantly reassess myself and police my actions for Him in everything I did—nay, I even policed my innermost thoughts, impulses, and intimate notions. He was watching me, and knew that which I would hide and that which I would declare. Even though I could not see Him, He could see me: "He knows that which deceives the eyes and what the breasts conceal."[7]

I used to praise Him in good times, bad times, and in times of severe trial. I used practice patience and fortitude, and when an affliction befell me, I would say, "To God we belong, and to Him we shall return. Those are the ones upon whom are blessings from their Lord, and mercy. And they are those who are the rightly-guided."[8]

Nighttime was my golden opportunity for making du'a and lamenting, for remembrance and contemplation. For an intimate dialogue and for additional worship. For turning to God and imploring Him, and for turning to Him in fear. I would reprimand the soul "that is prone to evil."[9] In fact, my extreme piety and obsession led to me not facing God in du'a until after accounting myself very strictly, and examining what I had sent before and after (from du'a of the Prophet). I used to feel ashamed to meet God with a sin on my account!

There is no question of exaggeration here, for indeed, in those early days, I was truly at the height of my religious zeal, and the mark on my forehead is a testament to that: a reminder of a past that was pervaded by devotion, and a heart enveloped by faith. While others sufficed with praying the compulsory prayers, with a few adding to them by praying sunnah prayers, my prayers often exceeded an hour because of the thikrs and wirds and du'as and nawafil.

I was especially fond of getting up in the night before Fajr, for this was the time I felt the closest to God. Most people were asleep, and in the quiet, cool darkness, I could feel God's presence close. I would pray the night prayer and then make du'a, for this was the time when du'as are answered, as narrated in the noble hadith: "Allah descends to the lowest heaven every night when two-thirds of the night is over and says, 'Is there anyone asking who may be given? Is there anyone supplicating who may be answered?'"

I tried to avoid asking anyone but God, in accordance with the noble hadith: "O, my son! If you ask, then ask God, and if you seek help, then seek help from God, and know that if the people were to gather against you to harm

[7] Sura al-Ghafir 40:19.
[8] Sura al-Baqara 2:157
[9] Surah Yusuf 12:53

you, they will not be able to harm you with anything that is not destined for you, and if they were to gather together to benefit you, they will not benefit you with anything that is not written for you. The pens have dried and the scrolls have been folded."

I used to praise God and thank Him for giving me the blessing to perform my extra acts of worship and thikr, for I believed He had chosen me for these sweet, long hours that I was able to grab in my daily life so that I could seclude myself with God (Glory be to Him) and empty my heart to Him of my concerns and sorrows, and show my sincere love and devotion.

I would never eat, drink, move, visit the doctor or a friend, or enter a house or exit from it, or take on a task, or say a word, or give an opinion, until I mentioned God's name and sought His guidance, and relied upon Him, and requested from Him success.

It was my habit that if I saw a sick person or someone with a disability, I would pray for them to be cured and aided, and I would also thank God for my health. I was quite certain that he who loves God and is sincere to Him will be like the king of the universe. There were some moments that gripped me where I felt the presence of God in me, and mine in His, as though I was a part of Him and He was a part of me. So who is stronger than me or mightier than me in this world? I thought about the noble hadith qudsi: "The servant does not cease to come near to Me through extra acts of worship until I love him, and when I love him, I become his hand with which he grips, his eyes with which he sees and his hearing by which he hears."

Whenever I succeeded in anything, I would attribute it to the bounty of God, whereas if I failed at anything, I would only blame myself and ask God, Most High, to give me success. In both cases, I would praise God and thank Him, and seek refuge in Him from the evil of my soul and evil of my actions. In such instances, I remembered the words of God, Most High: "But perhaps you hate a thing and it is good for you; and perhaps you love a thing and it is bad for you. And Allah knows, while you know not." (2:216) For He alone (Glory be to Him) knows the unseen. In this way, I consoled myself by bringing God to mind in every situation. "Verily, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest!" (13:28) By this, I hoped to emulate the prophets, the pious, and God's beloved Al-Mustafa: the chief of the messengers, the seal of the prophets, and the best of all mankind.

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*The Test Phase:*

Then came the test.

A test involves both honouring and debasing a person. That is the difficult test, in which the reality of the Lord and the promises and threats that the Lord has long showered upon us are revealed! Now was the moment of truth. Either I would persist in returning to God and my reliance on Him, strengthening my resolve to be near Him

and to distribute my time upon good occupations and worship, keeping the company of the pious and never failing in prayers, fasting, and all the other duties and acts of worship, or I would cut the rope between me and Him.

During this time, I suffered several severe crises, and I was burdened with debts, worries, and distresses that had no way out. Every door was closed in my face, and every road was blocked. I tried every solution, and attempted every answer. However, "The approaching day has approached. There is no one besides Allah that can remove it." [10]

Then, when I found myself incapable and at a complete loss, I called to mind the words of God, Most High: "Is He [not best] who responds to the distressed and desperate one when he calls upon Him?"[11]

Therefore, I said, "O, God, I seek recourse to you as one who is distressed and desperate, and who has no means to remove my afflictions. Please answer my prayer. O, God, please have mercy upon my weakness, and remove my suffering and lighten my affair. O, God, do not leave a sin but forgive it, nor affliction but remove it, nor a need but fulfill it.

O, He…O, He: The Possessor of Bounty and Goodness, O Lord of Majesty and Bounty. You are the helper of those who take refuge, the guarantor of the starving, the aider of those who seek aid, the one who takes in the destitute, the one who answers the du'a of the distressed and desperate!

People have gone to their beds and are sleeping in their rooms so that just the lover and his beloved are alone together. You are my beloved, O the most beloved of those who are loved. You are my hope and my utmost desire. O, you who said (and your promise is true): 'He who calls on me I will answer.'[12] Please, answer my du'a, for I have come to you singing your praises and devoted to you, admitting my incapacity and unworthiness, confessing my sins. I stand at your door, beseeching your help, imploring your mercy. Please, have mercy upon me, O Most Merciful of those who show Mercy!"

Thus it was that I opened my soul to God, beseeching Him and seeking His help and assistance with honest intentions, good works, and sincerity towards God alone. I was, at that time, constantly striving to be a faithful and obedient servant to God.

"O, God! Listen to the one who is of hungry heart, of needy heart, of a heart deprived, of a heart that suffers. I call on you with all of your most blessed names. My debts have piled up and have become huge. O God, I have saved for this dark hour. How can I meet these debts? Should I sell my house, when it is all that I have? Where shall I and my family live? O, you who possesses the treasures of the heavens and the earth: '…and to God belong the treasures of the heavens and the earth,'[13] 'And there is not a thing but with Us are the treasures of it.'[14] O God, bestow upon me just one grain from the bounty that you promised to those who spend their wealth in your path: 'The parable of those who spend their property in the way of Allah is as the parable of a grain growing seven ears [with] a hundred grains in every ear; and Allah multiplies for whom He pleases; and Allah is Ample-giving, Knowing.'"[15]

I implored and beseeched God to the extent that it turned into weeping, and confiding, and continuous quiet whispering, and humble personal du'as for help, mercy, and forgiveness. I was persistent in du'a and faithful in religion, seeking only His help, His sustenance, and His aid. I did not cease beseeching. I began to apologise for my

[10] Surah An-Najm (53:57-58)
[11] (27:62)
[12] Surah Ghafir 40:60
[13] Surah Al-Munafiqun 63:7
[14] Surah Al-Hijr 15:21
[15] Surah Al-Baqarah 2:261

persistence and for the world that I carried on my back, and that I was a burden for and it a burden for me. I collapsed with exhaustion with my tears flooding out. I was weak, ill, and a pitiful sight!

I waited and waited, though I never ceased in beseeching God. I kept hoping God would eventually help me avert disaster. But disaster was not averted. Even then, I kept praying and waiting. But I waited in vain. Little by little, doubts started creeping in, having been sleeping and suppressed before that point. Doubts grew and began to emerge to test me in my faith. I shall not hide the fact that when these doubts began to trouble me, I felt a prick of conscience. I felt that I shouldn't be having these doubts. I felt I was going away from the God that I had, for so long, loved and pledged my life to.

Had God abandoned me in my darkest hour? I tried hard to suppress these doubts, seeking God's good pleasure. But why is God humiliating me so? Despite the fact that I was losing hope, I threw myself into God's hands and turned my face to Him with this du'a that I was afraid was going to be my last:

"O, God, save me! I cannot bear to be apart from you! O, God, I fear I may slip into that which does not please you and does not please me. O, God! I am on the edge of a cliff. O, God! I am on the edge of the pit of Hell. Save me—please! Please, save me from it, O, the Mighty, the Supreme."

How my tears just kept coming! And how my du'as and beseeching never stopped! But I noticed that, after all of these du'as and beseeching, to my horror, God's answer was the opposite of what I begged him for. Perhaps He, Most Sublime, doesn't understand Arabic very well. So what language should I speak to him in? Is this reasonable? I don't know. Even though Adam's language was Arabic, and the language of the people of paradise is Arabic, also…Perhaps Adam's Arabic is different from our Arabic? Or perhaps He didn't hear me? Even though He (Glory be to Him) hears the footsteps of the black ant on the solid rock, in the darkness of night. Or is He pretending not to hear me for some reason I am unaware of?

Who knows? Perhaps my du'as were just a grating noise that hurt His ears, Mighty and Sublime is He. If not, then how is it that each time I come close to Him, He moves away from me? Doesn't that show that He doesn't want to hear my voice? Or is it that He basically doesn't care, because I am no more than a mosquito in this universe? But I dedicated myself to One who was greater than me.

The strange thing is that the parting between me and Him did not intensify until after I said, "I cannot bear to be apart from you!" Perhaps the "not," the sound of negation, came off my tongue while I was choking with tears, and so He didn't hear it? Is it possible that the word "bear" and "parting" have a different meaning with God? Or that He (Glory be to Him) does not like speech whose meaning is specific and defined? That could help us explain, at last, the existence of verses in the Qur'ān that are strange and curious and full of bombastic and contradictory passages, with rhymed, harmonious expressions that have no meaning, but in which the waffling Qur'ānic commentators found a thousand meanings, a thousand wisdoms, a thousand points of eloquence, and a thousand miraculous subtleties, as we shall see later?

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*The Whirlwind Phase:*

It wasn't long until I was overwhelmed by confusion and gripped by turmoil. A whirlwind raged inside me. It required all my inner strength and resolve to steady myself in the face of this storm. I remained, for some time, suffering from a deep crisis of faith and intense anguish. Doubting those immutable religious and cultural constants of one's life is like having a volcano erupting inside of them. Your instincts and senses rebel against you taking the audacious step of doubting the foundation of your identity and worldview. But it is a necessary step in order to build a new identity and a new mentality, for doubting is the path to truth. "For he who does not doubt has not looked, and he who has not looked does not see, and he who does not see remains blind and confused," as al-Ghazali said.[16]

Oh, how my hopes were dashed! All the prayers and worship and devotion and piety for the sake of God and seeking His good pleasure…All of that did not succeed in getting (if such an expression has any meaning) even a glance of acknowledgement or the slightest attention from Him. For it seems that He (Glory be to Him) has bigger things on His mind than the concerns of these human insects that crawl on the surface of Earth. Greater than the troubles of His faithful servants, who Iblees excluded from his seduction and snares when he said, while addressing God in His glory, "By Your power, I will definitely seduce them astray all together, except Your sincere servants from among them."[17] They are the ones who God (Glory be to Him) warned him from coming close to and from inflicting any evil upon: "As for My slaves, you will have no power over them."[18]

Even in regards to those devout servants, of which I was one, for whom God had promised: "There shall be no fear upon them, nor shall they grieve," in thirteen verses[19], it doesn't appear that He (Glory be to Him) cares about them or places any value on them. That is, of course, if He even knows they exist. The waffling commentators say that this promise applies to the next life, and not this life. This is because this life, in God's sight, is not worth the wing of a mosquito! If that is true, then does that mean that God ignores them in this life so that they die of hunger, when He said: "There is no creature on Earth except that its sustenance is upon God,"[20] and, "Is the reward of good anything other than good?"[21]

From that time, while spinning in the tornado of doubt, and after having believed that all past successes in life were due to God's blessing that He had favoured me with, for which I must give gratitude and praise, I began to look at my successes as being the result of my own efforts and struggles to achieve what I wanted and accomplish my aims—which God actually had nothing to do with.

The meaning of this is that I no longer saw any evidence for His (Most High) saying: "Say: 'My Lord would not care for you were it not for your prayer.'"[22] The apparent reality is that He (Glory be to Him) does not care about the earth and those on it. Perhaps He hasn't heard of it amongst the billions and billions of planets in that vast space that has no beginning or ending. He has other business and concerns that we can never hope of comprehending, and which have nothing to do with our trivial pain and suffering. They are much more important than the troubles of Hajj Saeed Khamkham, Abu Qasim al-Tanbouri, Umm Ghuntous, or Sayyida Halima. What does He care about these

[16] The Balance of Action. p.409.
[17] Surah Sad 38:82-83 and Surah al-Hijr 15:39-40
[18] Sura al-Hijr 15:42 & Sura al-Isra' 17:65
[19] See: 2:8 & 62 & 112 & 262 & 274 & 277, 3:170, 5:69, 6:45, 7:35 & 49, 10:62, 43:68, 46:13.
[20] Surah Hud 11:6
[21] Surah Al Rahman 55:60
[22] Surah Al-Furqan 25:77

frogs and insects that never stop croaking, and who fill Earth with screams, as though they are important creatures? He has other things that concern Him.

Woe to my foolishness and stupidity! Oh, my idiocy! How naive I was for allowing fairytales to eat up my life and the flower of my youth! Oh, my grief at a life spent with a loved one who could not care less for me, who not even for a minute knew that I existed! Oh, perish and curses! How did I not discover that and come to my senses, except when I am at the door of old age? What came over me? What remains of my life to experience the joy of my existence?! Would that I didn't know that! Woe to he who knows the truth! Blessed are the ignorant, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens!

Worse than that: in my effort to save the special relationship between me, the deceived and last to know, and the beloved who I could not bear to part from, I came up with all sorts of excuses for His indifference and disregard towards me. Sometimes, I would explain it as a type of toying and teasing, because He wants to test me and see the extent of my love for Him. When I looked at it this way, I saw every misfortune and closed door as God's way of testing those He loves. So every time He blocked me, my love for Him increased to the extent that I began to feel intense ardour for every misfortune, and passion for rejection! I just could not believe that He would just ignore me, or worse still: that there was actually no-one listening, and I was just talking to myself. Thus, I fell for the myth of "it is a test." It is that myth that religions keep repeating and relying upon to blackmail their followers and train them to acquiesce and submit. What else could I do? Did I have any other choice?

In short, how foolish I was when ardently struggling to rationalise and philosophise the afflictions and misfortunes that befell me! Every day, I was trying to discover a new wisdom and meaning behind them. This philosophising seduced me. I immersed myself in thikr and worship to try and cling on to my faith in my Lord. I renounced myself to hold onto my Lord. I was addicted to the liquor of my Lord. Ah! What was wrong with me and this need for my Lord? How much anguish I endured for the sake of my Lord! Oh, woe is to a life spent with my Lord!

Alas, for so long I tried to philosophise and justify adversity in the typical and intellectually-lazy manner of believers around the world. I employed all my philosophical skills—and oh, how philosophy is good at that! It is good for its history of searching for truth and indulging in explaining the truth, and it is full of defense of the absurd, the ridiculous, the nonsensical, and full of sophistry. Just the same, I also employed all that I possessed of expertise, sophisms, and mental gymnastics to rationalise the calamities that befell me, to try to extract the maximum amount of wisdoms, warnings, and lessons from them. Whenever I suffered an adversity or was wronged or struck by grief and depression, I used to rely on prostration, supplication, and seeking refuge with God, and calling on Him to the extent that it has left a mark on my forehead that time has not erased.

I used to always take comfort in the stories of the prophets, the messengers, and the pious. I would say to myself, "Disaster returns man to God," for the believer is tested with affliction, and I would recall His saying (Most High): "Do the people think that they will be left to say, 'We believe,' and they will not be tested with affliction?"[23] I recalled His saying (Mighty and Glorious is He): "Be sure We shall test you with something of fear and hunger, some loss in goods or lives, or the fruits (of your toil), but give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere. Who say, when afflicted with calamity, 'To God we belong, and to Him is our return.' They are those on whom are blessings from God, and Mercy, and they are the ones that are rightly-guided."[24]

[23] Surah Al-'Ankabut 29:2
[24] Surah Al-Baqarah 2:155-157

I got to the point where I was welcoming afflictions and was thanking God for them in the Sufi way I was accustomed to, for I followed their way and I would say, according to Sufi belief, that a disaster or affliction is just the punishment for a sin, which has been brought forward in this life as a mercy so that our slate will be clear in the next life when we face God! However, I had forgotten—or, perhaps, I pretended to forget, for I had an interest in neglecting to remember, as we shall see in a little while—that while disaster and affliction can sometimes bring man closer to God, it can, at other times, take him further away. Affliction is a path to God, but also a path to Shaytan!

I always used to praise God for my good outcomes and my protection from harm and illnesses. I used to say to myself, "Although God has not given me wealth, He has given me that which is much better: good health and wellbeing, for good health is very valuable!" How could I forget that value? For a rich person from our town had to travel to Europe and America for medical treatment, while I don't have the financial means to travel to either—never mind to pay the doctor's fees, or the cost of the medicines and hospital charges.

Praise God, my son; praise God! Yes, my son, that person is rich, but of what use will his riches and all that he has amassed be when Judgment Day comes? All of his wealth has gone into the accounts of doctors and hospitals, chemists and banks. The benefits that accrue upon them is enough, on their own, to cover the expenses of whole families who live in the slum areas of one of the shanty towns sprinkled around the edges of the major capitals in the countries of the Third World.

Remember, my son, also: that rich person who lives near you in the same district is afflicted with diabetes, and he wishes he could have a plate of hummus and foul medames. He is filled with rage every time he sees one of his workers going to eat this dish with great pleasure. So did all his money benefit him at all against God? Praise God, and be of the grateful! Thus it was that I wasn't able to do anything other than praise and thank God.

I forgot in the euphoria of my ascetic faith—and I still don't know if I chose to forget—the innumerable number of people that God bestowed excellent health and wellbeing upon, along with great wealth, prestige, and comfort! Just as I also forgot that, while God had saved me from some illnesses, He afflicted me with others.

Suffice it to say that I had to have four operations on my eyes, the most serious of which was for retinal detachment, just as I had to have five operations on my leg before reaching puberty. After the death of my father, I took on the responsibility of that myself, and the last of these operations was in Leopold Blanc Hospital in Paris in 1951. These repeated delicate operations have left me with two feet that cannot bear any shock as a result, never mind that all these operations were not able to correct the disability. For that reason, I still, until now, find it difficult to walk very far, even though I have adapted to the situation by getting used to it and through habit. So if my state is thus, then what am I praising and thanking God for, exactly? We are all in the same boat as far as illness is concerned.

As for our rich neighbour who God had deprived of health but given wealth…well, there are other innumerable sick people who not only have been deprived of health, but of wealth, also. On top of that, they not only suffer from diabetes or cancer or high blood pressure—or all of them together, or from other debilitating diseases—but on top of that, they are so poor they can't pay for an examination by a doctor, much less pay for medicine. They struggle on themselves, and they sit by the side of the road or at the doors of mosques, or they knock on the doors of houses if they can face the shame of doing that. And, if they cannot, they send out, on their behalf, their wives or their children to hold out their hands to people, begging them for help and charity!

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*The Investigation Phase:*

I remember I felt, during that time, a slight inclination towards Christianity. In fact, I even thought about embracing it, because it seemed spiritual and ethereal. However, I knew I could never believe in concepts such as the Trinity, Crucifixion, Atonement, Incarnation, Sacrifice, and the whole drama of Jesus' humiliation: blows, slaps and spitting without showing any resistance. His sufficing with threats from his father who didn't do anything to spare him. Where is the dignity of God when His only son, who He is supposed to love, is degraded like this?

I also didn't understand Jesus' complete silence in front of the rulers and Roman authorities, contrasted with his unrestricted verbosity with his disciples, pouring upon them promises, not just for this world but for the Kingdom of Heaven too. What was he afraid of, since he is one with God? Or, rather, the son of God, as they say? I don't know which of the two—and neither do they.

An impotent demigod, unable to defend himself, sufficing with threats from his father. Nay! Having to call on others to spread his message for him, then fleeing to his father, who, earlier in this theatrical charade, had abandoned him! In what way did Jesus actually benefit humanity after coming to Earth, mixing with people, curing the deaf, dumb, and blind, and bringing the dead to life, and other such tall-tales of folklore and legend? Did any of that actually ease the suffering of the poor and the wretched in any way? Did it alleviate the hunger of the starving, the oppression of the downtrodden, or remove the tyranny of the tyrants? All that Jesus did was preach weakness and crying. He cried with those who cry. With him, they increased by one more crying person, without him actually bringing anything to stop the crying of humanity and wipe away our tears.

Nor was Jesus a man to put up a fight, to struggle or resist. Instead, he thrust his disciples into battles and wars, and then quickly rushed off to sit by the right hand of his father in heaven! Is this a good example for the struggles and ordeals mankind faces?

He never spoke one word in front of the rulers, and yet he advised his disciples not only to verbally confront them, which he himself dodged by remaining completely silent, but to physically confront them, and to fight to raise the word of truth. He shoved them into the furnace while he ran away to paradise. He informed them about the misfortunes and suffering that they will face on Earth, and then saved himself from it! How is this self-sacrifice? Where is his struggle and suffering in comparison to, for example, his disciple, Paul?

However, despite the fact that, in my opinion, Christianity is a religion that begins with myth and ends with myth, while its whole narrative moves within the sphere of myth (and perhaps this is why it spread widely), I had decided in all sincerity to submit myself to Jesus in the desperate hope I might find shelter and refuge with him.

Who knows? Perhaps all that is attributed to him in the official Gospels is not true. Jesus must be different from that, because the Jesus of these Gospels is a man surrounded by myths on every side, to the extent that it is not possible to discern his real character. In fact, many scholars have begun to doubt his historical existence entirely. However, I, personally, do not go that far, because there are many historical events that I could not understand or explain except by inferring his existence. But if there is another historical Jesus, how did he disappear, and how did this mythical Jesus take his place?

Regardless of whether the Jesus of the Gospels is the real Jesus or a mythical character, I turned to him with all my heart, and this is amongst my inconsistencies—but it is a human weakness! I asked him to relieve my affliction, raise me from my fall, lift me out of my despair after having related to him my story and told him about my affairs,

and I cited the verse from the Gospel: "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you."[25]

So I asked until my voice was hoarse, and I sought until my throat was dry, and I knocked until my knuckles bled. I repeated that verse time and time again, I cried and beseeched, I called and I pleaded for help—but all in vain. For the god of the Qur'ān and Jesus of the Gospels are equally bankrupt.

I returned empty-handed, just as millions of Christians before me have left empty-handed. But who among them is willing to admit to that? The difference between me and them is that I used my mind, while they are happy to leave it on the shelf. The truth is that Jesus and the Christian god let me down. As for the Christians. they are not prepared to admit that he has let them down in any way. They will blame themselves so that they don't have to blame Jesus.

I wonder how people can believe all the nonsense in the holy books about answering prayers, when that belief is clearly shown to be false every minute of every day. How can Christians bear witness every day that God helped them achieve this or that, without seeing that their success and failure is no different than anyone else's, and that it has nothing to do with prayer, Jesus, or God? Yet nothing seems to affect the vigour or spread of Christianity, and new converts arrive every day!

Yes, how can people believe such nonsense? How could he lie to people? Did he really even say any of it? The truth is that he—or, rather, those who invented his words—are very clever, and knows very well that most people are foolish enough to believe anything. If not, then they wouldn't have spent two-thousand years asking, seeking, and knocking on Jesus' door without anyone ever answering them.

Stranger than that is that they all come up with different reasons and justifications as to why God didn't reply to them on this occasion, and why Jesus didn't grant them that request. And yet they don't cease insisting that He answers their prayers, while He doesn't cease ignoring them. Their disappointment is turned into a profound wisdom. God bless the ignorant! They live in bliss! It seems that religions cannot survive without stupidity, lies, and captivating promises.

I repeat: I wonder how people believe such things, defending them with unmatched zeal and vigour, despite their belief clearly being in vain and for nothing. If the matter has to do with promises of the next life, then of course that cannot be disproven, as it is like all eschatological events that cannot be verified, and so faith is enough and reason moves aside for it. But as for matters of this life, it is very easy to verify whether the promises are true or not, and yet, despite this, the believer doesn't apply reason to it. Instead, he looks at it with the eye of faith, and the eye of faith sees wisdoms and excuses. This is amongst the wonders of faith: it can do what reason cannot. The heavens have cut off the words of every spokesman.[26]

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[25] Matthew 7:7

[26] From an Arab proverb: "Jahizah has cut off the words of every spokesman." (قطعت جَهيزَةُ قول كلّ خطيب) Elders of two tribes met to resolve a murder. They were discussing whether blood money should be paid, when a woman called Jahizah interrupted saying "The killer had been caught and killed!" This left the speakers in the meeting with nothing to discuss.

*The Breaking-off Phase:*

Now, events moved quickly between me and my Lord. I had been disappointed by Him, as I had been disappointed by Jesus. Each one was as impoverished as the other. My Lord laid upon me obligations, but then threw me out. He promised me, but then failed to deliver. He raised my hopes, but then dashed them. Oh, what a waste of life spent in sincere devotion to Him due to my stupidity and thinking good of Him!

I was still being tugged back and forth between faith and doubt when the final break occurred between Him and me. I stopped praying, stopped fasting, and lost faith in the things I used to believe in. I regretted all that I had wasted in this respect. It was like a divorce and a parting of ways. I could not believe how foolish I had been. Who can remove the mark of prostration that disfigures my forehead, for it does not befit the wise in their advanced years?

From now on, I shall go it alone, without a god robbing me of my being. I know in advance that going it alone and standing on your own two feet is arduous and bleak—no, it is not bleak, at least not in my view, nor in the view of the man who believes in himself and believes in the spirit that rages inside us, in our ambitions and hopes. I will live with my belief in my dreams, my self-confidence, and my ability recognise lies and nonsense. I will live with my belief in action, striving to achieve the best that I can. Woe to the one who knows the truth but is not deserving of it, who is unable to handle it! For if he is not up to it, my advice to him is to never come near this book!

Doubts are nothing new in my life. They have beset me before, a long time ago. But I would quickly bury them straightaway and hide their signs. I used to constantly doubt things when I was a youngster, to the same extent that I was also very devout. I was regularly beset by a wave of doubts, and then a wave of pious devotion, as though lightening flashed inside of me and then subsided and became still again. I never used to hide my doubts when I was a student, and because of this I was denied the scholarships and financial support that the wealthy citizens of my town would bestow upon my colleagues so that they could study abroad. In fact, some of my colleagues went about distorting and exaggerating these doubts to deprive me of a scholarship to study abroad, so that they could take my place.

I don't deny that these doubts had a certain expediency, for they differed in times of hardship from times of ease. Can the friend (or God) truly be known, except in times of hardship? But that certainly didn't mean that expediency was behind these doubts. The matter was far more complicated than that, just as my devotion was. The battle between my doubts and my faith swayed back and forth between them. Glory be to the One who turns hearts. This is what the masses say, for the hearts of men are between two fingers of the Merciful, and He turns them as He wishes, as related in the noble hadith, and which they support with the words of God, Most High: "And know that Allah intervenes between a man and his heart and that to Him you will be gathered."[27]

My relationship with God was severed. I no longer asked Him for anything or relied on Him for anything. In fact, I challenge Him to prevent me from doing that which I can do, or make me do that which I cannot do. I have no need of Him if it is really true that He has any influence in the things we do. That is, of course, if it is actually true that He even cares about people's needs, or hears their du'as, or even knows they even exist! Despite that, everything in my life is going just fine of its own accord: it has its ups and downs, highs and lows, good times and bad times, good

[27] Surah Al-Anfar 8:24

and bad fortunes, its comings and goings. Life has remained the way life always is: with complications, compositions, responsibilities, varieties, swings, and roundabouts.

My life has become mine after having been the shared property of the one I used to call "My Lord," who shared my life and who snatched from me my productive years. I used to spend them with Him and for Him, putting myself in His hands. Now I had become free and liberated after having been a slave and a serf. Oh, my grief over the toil and sweat of my life that His Sublimeness has stolen from me! It has deprived me of my youth, and would have taken what remains of my latter years if I hadn't come to my senses. I appointed Him as trustee and mandator over me, over my own free will and free choice, so He bequeathed me nothing but foolishness, nonsense, and idiocy, until I almost lost my reason and good sense to the blade of folly. And I would have lost my senses if it hadn't been that I managed to gather my determination, firm my resolution, and stand up to the test and come through it.

Thus, for the first time, I had made up my mind to leave captivity and experience freedom. I had made up my mind to dissolve the contract of trusteeship, the contract of ignominy that I had signed with my Lord. I was born free, but I had allowed myself to become a slave. But after today, I shall not allow anyone to enslave me again. Daylight has risen.

I shall not ask of God anything from today. That is, if there really is a God and if it isn't just merely talking to yourself, and asking yourself, and praying to yourself. In this case, prayer is simply an inner conversation and chit-chat with one's ego. Oh, how long I spent prattling to myself, thinking it kindled the light of transcendental truth, when all it did was anaesthetise my mind and dull my wit! It weakened my ambition and blinded my insight. It made me like a child, and robbed me of my lifeblood and the flowering of my life. It loaded me with farfetched expectations and aroused foolish aspirations. It undermined my self-belief and self-reliance, and seduced me into relying on the Lord of the Universe. Those days have gone. The gloom has been lifted and cleared. My consciousness has returned to me. I have come out of my coma!

My task in this book is to tear away the curtains and reveal the secrets, and expose that which was guarded in order to arrive at the hidden pearl. It is a sincere call to put an end to one stage and start a new stage. To end the stage of sleep and oblivion and begin the stage of awakening, realization, and understanding. After that, everything will be easier.

I am keenly aware that, with this book, I am playing with fire. So be it! For if the fire doesn't burn the impurities, we will never get pure gold. It's true that cauterisation should be the last resort, but what can I do, even though I realise that I, myself, may be the first to be burnt by it? But if you want to be a man, you must confront danger. That shall be my slogan for life. For if it wasn't for the burning candle shedding light for others, then, by God, there would be no light. That is what it can do—nay, that is its mission. It is my hope and privilege to be that candle.

People's souls are almost brimming over. Hearts are full to the tipping point. Horizons are being suppressed, and pens silenced. Fresh breaths are trapped and stuttering. Slips of the tongue are to be found in every place. The mouths have water in them.[28] Can that which has water in its mouth speak? If you want to alleviate the misery and grief and remove the calamity and anguish, then come join me in climbing over the walls that keep us locked in, and keep away from the guards.

Read what is not written in the writings of Ta Ha Hussein. Read the suppressed, or what is written between the lines in his book, *Pre-Islamic Poetry*, for example. You will be surprised! Likewise, read Zaki Naguib Mahmoud and

[28] From an Arab proverb which means that people have something to say, but they are unable to say it. This passage is referring to the suppression of freethinkers in the Arab world—in fact in the Muslim world as a whole!

Ismai'l Mazhar in their early writings, before they returned to the cattle enclosure when they approached old age, fearing what might await them after death. Likewise, read Abdel Rahman Badawi in his first books. You will find that which will surprise you even more. Even this giant of Arabic literature began to lose his powers in the latter period of his life. We are all the same when it comes to fear; it is a human weakness.

The energy of the people is tensed for the starting pistol; minds are craned and all set to go. Everyone is fully ready for action. But they are waiting for a spark. They are all frightened of lighting that spark because of the torrent it will unleash upon them. Perhaps fate has chosen that this book will be that spark. What will be will be. I say clearly, without any pride, that you will not find in Arabic, throughout its history—including in the Abbasid period, which witnessed some bold rejection of religion—a book like this book in respect of its explicit, clear, unambiguous, and earnest telling it as it is without equivocation, twisting, hypocrisy, or lies.

You will also not find any personal slander, libel, or any reference to the private lives of the people who I refer to. Nor will I stoop to the level of some critics of Islam, who throw about abuse, slander, and attack Muslims personally, for slander and personal attacks are not the characteristics of sincere scholars. Going into the private lives of people in order to hunt around for mud to sling at them as a way of dismissing them while avoiding what they say is a major abuse to them, and a violation of that which should not be violated. Ideas are only defeated with better ones: "As for the foam, it vanishes, cast off; but as for that which benefits the people, it remains on the earth. Thus does Allah present examples." [29]

I know full well that this may cost me my life. But I have tasted life, both its sweetness and its bitterness. Nay, its bitterness more than its sweetness, and I am prepared to face my fate. I want to say what I have to say before I go. As for what will be after that, let it be. That will be my fate. He whose fate is laid out must walk that path. I am not the first person who has been betrayed by ignorance and reactionaryism, and I also won't be the last.

After the publication of this book, there may be an angry storm of knee-jerk reactions, intolerance, slander, and accusations, with a limit and without limit. A volcano may erupt, but at the same time, there will be some who will defend the book, and who will challenge the ignorant attacks, injustice, and dishonesty. They will call for an objective analysis and a sober, scholarly approach. Between these will be those groups with vested interests, middlemen, and those who have a stake in the status-quo. They will incite the tyrants and the religious clerics and all those who fish in troubled waters.

Thus, the door will open to everyone who knocks. The authorities, of course, side with the angry masses and fundamentalists. The freethinkers are rounded up and made examples of. Those with vested interests support efforts to eradicate and assassinate by instigating and inciting the khateebs of mosques, the simple-minded, and those of good-intentions (not to mention those with bad intentions) in the name of defending the religion and faith.

I am certain that, in our countries, more than half of those who oppose this book will be illiterate, and will not have read it. If they have read it, they have not understood it—that is, if they were able to come across a copy of it. The governments will ban it straightaway, unless one of the bookshops manages to hide a few copies to sell secretly. But, if it gains attention, the masses will not be satisfied with simply banning it—no, they will demand it be burnt publicly, and to spill the blood of its author, if he still lives and has not been thrown into prison.

In this case, the Western media would not stand idly by, but would condemn the intolerance and repression of freedoms and human rights violations. Many will slander Arabs and Muslims, and denounce the forces of

[29] Surah Ar-Ra'd (13:17)

backwardness and ignorance. The wicked and simple-minded will grab this opportunity to accuse the author of being a Zionist agent.

The possibility of all of that does not bother me. The only important thing, in my opinion, is that I am true to myself and that I say what I must say, even if I am on the edge of the abyss. I hope I can push the door open a little, for if it is opened, it won't be shut again. It is only natural that the agitators will agitate, the revolutionaries will revolt, and the hunters will increase and proclaim doom and destruction and cataclysmic events.

The shock will be huge in a country that is sleeping and impassive in its error, wandering astray. It is not used to shocks. Most people are not able to look at the light of truth. But this light and the succession of shocks are the only way to reinvent ourselves and renew ourselves, and enter the age of enlightenment. If we don't, then we will remain in darkness.

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## Chapter Two: The Methodology of Examining the Qur'ān

There are two methods to understand the Qur'ān. The first is the Methodology of Transmission, which gives precedence to revelation over reason, and involves the unquestioning acceptance of the veracity of the text and the inability of reason to comprehend its ultimate aims and objectives. The second method, the Methodology of Reason, gives precedence to reason over revelation, and its ability to comprehend the truth without need for reference to the text. The text is the last concern of the mind that is, in itself, free and independent.

For that reason, when I write this book, I will employ the Methodology of Reason, which Descartes established at the beginning of the modern age, even though he did not always abide by it, failing in particular to apply it in understanding religious texts. Instead, he maneuvered, twisted, and distorted the neck of reason to stop the rot that fills revelation, and that which revelation contains of the garbage that diseases minds.

See how this great man compromises for the sake of divine text? Descartes wasn't the first to compromise—not at all—and he will not be the last, apart from those who believe in reason and act according to it, and trust that which reason obligates—and they are few, indeed! For divine text has such influence and power that few can withstand it.

The fundamental principle of the methodology of reason is impartiality and objectivity, and the ability to approach the research with a mind free from prejudice and bias. "Bias is sickness," as they say. In this spirit, we must resolutely proceed in studying the Qur'ān, and treat it as we would any other scientific research. We must subject it to examination, analysis, skepticism, rejection, and contestation, because that is what will make our examination fruitful and profitable, and make it of universal benefit.

Applying the Methodology of Reason to the Qur'ān is, in my view, a pivotal and momentous event that will shake the Earth below the feet of those who follow blind faith and who are trapped within the straight-jacket of imitation and slavish conformity. And it is something that must be done, for the most extreme cure is cauterization.

The Qur'ān has deep roots in our cultural composition, and if these roots are shaken, the composition changes to a different composition, and destiny changes to a different destiny, and a people will change to a different people, and, as a consequence, a new generation will emerge that wasn't in the reckoning. For that reason, the first thing I will confront you with in this discourse is that I doubt the Qur'ān, and in the god of the Qur'ān. I doubt the teachings of the Qur'ān, and I doubt the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān and sublime language of the Qur'ān.

I insist on doubt; I embrace it on principle. Doubt, as Al-Ghazali says, leads one to the truth. So one who does not doubt cannot look, and one who does not look cannot see, and one who cannot see will remain in blindness and error.

This is my method in doing the work, and this is how I start examining, thinking, reading, and reflecting until the circumstances lead me to something resembling certainty. That is because what we call the miraculous and infallible Qur'ān is really like any other piece of human work, containing error as well as correctness.

I am aware of the consequences of that which I have arrived at, but that won't deter me from proving them and broadcasting them, and expressing my opinion freely. I know in advance that it will lead to mortal dangers and grave confrontations that, I perhaps, don't need. But I will not stop—no! For truth deserves to be followed. I will take refuge in a mountain that will protect me from the water, as far up as I am able to climb, and, if it does not protect me, then martyrdom is better than suffering such incapacity and weakness. I must declare what I believe in, and what many others besides me believe in, although they are waiting for the spark of light. After that, many sparks of light will come, and the sparks of light will illuminate the dark tunnel that we are living in. Is there any other way to escape from a path?

As for the reasons that led me to doubt in the Qur'ān, they are its contradictions, generalisations, pompous rhetoric, and facetious phrases that have no meaning. The grammatical and stylistic errors that the classical scholars were at their wits' end trying to find explanations for. And other mistakes, both of scientific and historical natures that I consider the Lord of the Worlds to be above making.

Similarly, the Qur'ān is full of rhetorical explosive charges and verbal bombs that create such an extreme uproar that ears almost become deaf. But after deep analysis, and despite what it contains of sweetness and charm and alluring beauty, it becomes clear that it is pale, emaciated, with little content and lacking substance, like bubbles in the air, or radiating beams of light from fireworks that soon extinguish and fall to the ground, spent, leaving behind pitch darkness: "It is as though it is a bolt of lightning, glistening with fury, which then fizzles out and as though it never shone."[30]

Many of the prose of the masters of eloquence (classical literati), and even the doggerel of soothsayers, is better—a thousand times better, in fact—than many of the Qur'ānic verses that are of nonsensical language and so stuffed full of fairy tales that the Qur'ānic commentators (and, strangely, some Mu'tazilites) became masters of dealing with and defending.

[30] A line from a poem by Ibn Sina

There remains another matter, and it isn't the last. It is the matter of the indictment of the Qur'ān upon the Qur'ān, for the narrative of the Qur'ān is confused, for how abundant are the contradictions of the Qur'ān? The Almighty has said, "And if this was from other than Allah, you would have found a lot of contradiction."

The Qur'ān has passed the guilty verdict upon itself! For that which it contains of contradictions goes beyond the limit of "a lot." Nay, it is the centre of every disparity and contradiction! The amount of disparities and contradictions in any other book in the world has not yet reached the level of the Qur'ān. Yet they want us to believe that there is neither disparity nor contradiction in the Qur'ān. We must ignore the evidence to believe that which does not agree with reason in the manner of "Believe Allah, and disbelieve the stomach of your brother."[31] But if you do not ignore evidence and reason, then you will see and hear that which will not please you.

I am not calling for the renunciation of religion, for that is a difficult objective. In fact, it is a demand that cannot be sought, because religion, for all of its adherents, is a sweet nectar, and for so long I savoured this sweetness until I returned to my senses.

I say that I am not calling for the renunciation of religion, but I am calling for the end of resorting to religion for decisions in all matters, and allowing it to stick its nose into every tiny matter in the affairs of life. And this goal can be achieved by applying secularism as a principle, both in thought and in life. Secularism is not disbelief, nor is it a call to disbelief, as some of its enemies portray it as. It is merely placing a limit to the interference between religion and the state.

Religion is not the execution of the captive, nor the stoning of the adulterer, nor the chopping of the hand of the thief. Religion, according to secularists, is that which lives in the heart and dwells in the conscience. Believe what you like, but beware of imposing your beliefs on others, and do not make it into a system for government or life. Religion is for God, while the nation is for everyone. That is the slogan of secularism.

There is nothing inviolable, nothing sacred in secularism. The only thing that is inviolable and sacred in it is humanity, and the value of humanity, and the freedom of humanity, and respect for the dignity of humanity. Secularism means the lack of exploitation of one man by another. The unbeliever (kafir) is not the one who disbelieves in religion. The only unbeliever is the one who disbelieves in humanity and human rights.

The value of life is reason. The value of life is freedom. The value of life is progress and development. The value of life is innovative vision, and the ability to express it according to what suits the requirements of the time and place. As for disbelief and belief, angels and devils, it creates conflict that impedes the development of innovations and the flow of progress in a world of powers, balances of powers, and centers of powers.

The thing that most frightens man is to be consigned to the debris of memory. We have been ruminating over myths and delusions, in a trance over the invisible and over and text, and over claims of miraculousness. We have consumed the rhetoric, and allowed ourselves to follow the stories of the Garden of Eden and the Houris, and the verse of light and the servant boys of paradise, and stories of jinn, and tales of Luqman. The likes of these stories and tales have, for so long, fertilized the minds and imaginations, both in the near and distant past, but today they lose the bet.

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[31] This is a reference to the following hadith: "A man came to the prophet and said, 'My brother has got loose motions. The Prophet said, Let him drink honey." The man again (came) and said, 'I made him drink (honey) but that made him worse.' The Prophet said, 'God has spoken the truth, and the stomach of your brother has told a lie."

## Chapter Three: The Qur'ān According to the Belief of Muslims

*The Qur'ān is the Speech of God:*

It was a barren, desolate desert that Muhammad emerged from to proclaim his words. His words appeared as an Arabic recitation which he considered to be without error. Muhammad shook himself down,[32] quite certain that he had received a command from the unseen and been appointed by heaven to warn a people who had gone astray. "O, you wrapped up (in a cloak)! Get up and warn (people)!"[33]

It was a transcendental experience that the Arabs and Muslims from East to West believe Muhammad was chosen for in order to lead the Arabs, to take them out of darkness and into the light. The "prophet," who is caught between the constraints of reality and the requirements of the historical context that he finds himself in, did not regard his role to be anything other than a courier of a message. A conveyer of a book revealed to him by God.

Indeed, in all the stages of the "revelation," as it is called, we sense it is as though the language is struggling to articulate itself in the face of a world of possible phrasings. To let its meanings flow as a sweet, clear spring. So along came the man who is up to the task, safeguarding its source and unleashing its creative forces and possibilities. At last, this language can realise its dreams. With the Qur'ān, it reached the furthest extent of its aspirations, aims, expectations, and goals.

The Arabic language then continued its course after the departure of the man who raised its voice and championed it, until its limit was transcended, its extent spread, its horizons widened, and it pierced borders and boundaries. It then produced ripe fruit, a good harvest, and sweet-tasting food, delicious to eat and drink. It produced great and unique writers and poets in every field of literature and art. It absorbed everything, and never despaired of being able to express any idea or concept. As though in a blink of an eye (or quicker, still), it changed from the language of the sword and the camel to the language of science, art, philosophy, and civilisation.

It is, indeed, Muhammad's remarkable miracle. It strengthened Muhammad's mission and reinforced his message in the face of other amazing miracles attributed to past prophets. It added new dimensions that brought the promise of progress, prosperity, bounty, power, vigour, and the ability to shine in glory for centuries.

This miracle and its clear signs were enough for Muhammad. He didn't need any other miracles to come to him from the world of the unseen that the Creator of the Heavens and Earth could have opened up for him yet begrudged him even one single miracle of the like He bestowed on the earlier prophets!

[32] Reference to waking up from the states Muhammad would go into when receiving revelation, which included becoming hot, flushed, sweaty, hearing noises like a bell, clenching teeth, and shaking.
[33] Al-Muddaththir 74:1-2

Linguistically, Qur'ān (قُرْآن) is the verbal noun from the verb "to read" (قرأ). This verbal noun means "recitation," and orientalist scholars have suggested that it is derived from the Syriac "qeryānā," which means "recitation of scripture in a liturgical context." However, in common usage, it means the holy text that God revealed to His prophet, Muhammad ibn Abdullah, the one foretold of in previous revelations, who transmitted it in an unbroken chain of authority. It is used for worship by reciting it and adhering to its teachings.

The Qur'ān has many names, and among them are: The Book (الكتاب); The Criterion (الفرقان); The Reminder (الذكر); The Revelation (التنزيل); and The Speech of God (كلام الله). It is described in Arabic as Noble (الكريم); Glorious (المجيد); Mighty (العزيز); Wise (الحكيم); The Momentous (العظيم); The Clear or Making Clear (المبين) on a preserved tablet, without crookedness, with no falsehood coming to it in front or behind it. It guides to that which is more upright. It is a cure for man and a mercy for the believers. Had God revealed it to a mountain, you would have seen it humbled and crumbling apart from fear of Allah. If men and jinn were to gather together to bring the likes of it, they will not be able to, even if they help each other. If it was from other than God, you would find in it much discrepancy.[34]

Unlike the Old and New Testaments, the Qur'ān is not described using the word "Muqaddas," or "holy" (مُقَدَّسٌ), although a derivative of that word, also meaning holy (قُدْسِيٌّ), is used as a description of the hadiths where the Prophet mentions something that God has said. This is then referred to as "Hadith Qudsi." In other words, they are God's words, but not in the same sense as they are in the Qur'ān.

The Qur'ān is speech that assumes an addresser and addressee. As for the addressee, that is well known: the speech in the Qur'ān is always addressed directly to Muhammad in the first instance, and then to the Muslims after that, and to all human beings in all times and all places. The Qur'ān addresses the Prophet many times, advising and consoling him. Sometimes, He is scolding and reprimanding him, and sometimes replying to him and responding to thoughts he had of his own, explaining his mistake and correcting him in some of his judgments, and turning him to a better alternative.

Sometimes, the Qur'ān not only uses the pronoun of the second person, but also the pronoun of the third person in reference to Muhammad, such as in the first two verses of Sura Abasa: "He frowned and turned back, that the blind man came to him."[35] In essence, these verses are saying, "You frowned, O Muhammad, and turned your face away from the blind man when he came to you seeking guidance. You left him for the notables of the Quraysh and groups of the polytheists who have shown they don't care about you, and are not interested in what you have to say."

But then, the narrative suddenly starts addressing Muhammad directly: "And how do you know? Perhaps he could become purified. Or he might have received the message so the reminder would profit him? As for he who regards himself self-sufficient, to him you attend, even though there is no blame on you if he fails to be purified. But as for the one who came to you striving hard and with fear, from him you were otherwise preoccupied." [36]

In some cases, the Qur'ān deals with Muhammad's personal affairs rather than addressing the believers in general. For example, in the Qur'ān, it was forbidden for his wives to remarry after him. However, as a general rule, it is permissible (in fact, it is encouraged) for a widow to get married again to another man according to the principals of Shari'ah.

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[34] This and other parts of this chapter are full of Qur'ānic references. I will not provide citations and explanations for them all as there are so many, and it would also be redundant since most Muslims are familiar with these references.
[35] Surah 'Abasa 80:1-2
[36] Surah 'Abasa 80:3-10

In other cases, however, Muhammad was instructed by God, but not with a Qur'ānic "revelation" (الوحي), as it concerned him only. Instead, it was revealed to Muhammad in a way he did not clarify. For example, Muhammad and his family were forbidden from receiving Sadaqa (charity), but that was not told as a Qur'ānic revelation. Likewise, it was forbidden for Muhammad to inherit and to bequeath inheritance. This was also not mentioned in the Qur'ān, while other matters involving him alone were.

So we know the addressee—the one who the speech is being directed to—but who is the addressor? Who is the one who is speaking? Whose speech is it? This is purely a matter of faith that cannot be touched upon, except within the framework of the belief of those who believe in it. No matter how widespread and far-reaching this framework is, it remains a framework that is limited to a time and place. In other words, it is restricted to a specific patch of land in specific period of time, inextricably bound to it, to the exclusion of all others.

If we direct this question to the one who transmitted this speech to us, namely Muhammad ibn Abdullah, he would respond unequivocally and candidly that the Qur'ān is the speech of the eternal God, who said to him in no uncertain terms that, "God—there is no god but Him, the Ever-Living, the Eternal. He has sent down upon you the Book in truth, confirming what was before it."[37] He also says, "And if any one of the polytheists seeks your protection, then grant him protection so that he may hear the words of God."[38] Likewise, He says, "And We revealed to you the message that you may make clear to the people what was sent down to them,"[39] and when addressing Muhammad, He issued this categorical statement: "The Trustworthy Spirit (Gabriel) brought it down upon your heart so that you would be of the warners in a clear Arabic tongue."[40] Then it says, highlighting the evidence that the Qur'ān is not the speech of Muhammad, and to emphasise his truthfulness and testify to his trustworthiness, thereby exonerating him of any dishonesty in delivering the message: "If he were to falsely attribute any words to Us, We would surely have seized him by his right hand, then We would have cut from him the aorta, and none of you could defend him!"[41]

All Muslims from East to West believe that the one who is speaking is God Most High, and that the Qur'ān is the speech of God that is revealed to his Prophet, who was sent as a giver of glad tidings and as a warner: "No falsehood comes to it either in front or behind it." It was revealed so that it would be a sign for people until the Day of Judgment, a miracle proving the truth of the revelation to Muhammad.

Thus began the myth of the miraculousness of the Qur'ān, which we will discuss later. The Qur'ānic narrative does not attribute any miracle to the Prophet other than the miracle of the Qur'ān. It is proof of his truthfulness. As a result, he is known as the truthful prophet who delivered from his Lord that which he was commanded to deliver, without adding or taking away anything, and without any distortion coming upon it.

God in the Qur'ān expresses Himself using His glorious name with no pronoun at times: "So remember God like you remember your ancestors."[42] At other times, He uses the first person: "Remember Me, and I shall remember you."[43] In other places, He uses the third person: "Then He directed Himself to heaven while it was smoke and said to it and to the earth, 'Come [into being], willingly or by compulsion.' They said, 'We have come willingly.'"[44] Finally,

[37] Surah Ali 'Imran 3:2-3
[38] Surah At-Tawbah 9:6
[39] Surah An-Nahl 16:44
[40] Surah Ash-Shu'ara 26:193-195
[41] Surah Al-Haqqah (69:46)
[42] Surah Al-Baqarah (2:200)
[43] Surah Al-Baqarah (2:152)
[44] Surah Fussilat (41:11)

He employs the first person plural at other times: "Indeed, We have revealed it as an Arabic Qur'ān."[45] Sometimes, it mixes in more than one of these forms in a single verse: "God says, 'I will send it down to you,'"[46] as we see in this verse where the third person is mixed with the first. The "it" in that verse refers to the table spread that the disciples asked Jesus ibn Maryam to ask God to send down to them from heaven.

It goes without saying that the Qur'ān, according to Muslims, is a sublime portion of the divine will that has existed since eternity. It is the very speech of God Himself. Both its construction and meaning was dictated to the Prophet, word-for-word, letter-for-letter. The one who dictated it is God through Gabriel, the Angel of Revelation, and the Trustworthy Spirit. This is a belief that is deeply entrenched in the minds of Muslims. He who denies it or says the Qur'ān is the work of Muhammad is a kafir, a rejecter of the pure religion. As a consequence, he deserves eternal punishment in the fires of Hell, forever within it—and what a terrible end!

The Qur'ān is unique in the way it provides the intellectual basis and complete framework for Muslims. It provides a network of concepts and a system of symbols by which it directs the actions of Muslims and gives meaning to their existence. It directs them to make everything they do in life, their achievements, and even their thinking process, in accordance with the highest ideal that it ordains for them.

The Qur'ān, according to the view of Muslims, is the comprehensive religious authority. It completed the universal process of divine revelation that came from God in order to guide people. It stresses the existence of a continuous and consistent message of divine source that took its final form in the Qur'ān itself. It is the source of all authorities in Islam. It is a compendium that expresses the intellectual, legislative, scientific, and cultural components of Islam.

The revelation is the word of God, and an expression of the will of God. It is the divine presence and power that appeared in different forms in a long chain of prophets and messengers. The previous forms changed and developed as time and context developed, but the underlying content remained the same, and could not change or be modified. The Qur'ān, however, is the word of God; eternal and everlasting, and that which does not submit to relativism and changing standards of time and place.

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*The Qur'ān is the Centre for all Schools of Thought and Opinion in Islam:*

According to the view of Muslims, the Qur'ān is the beacon of all fields of knowledge, wisdom, philosophy, legislation, culture, and literature. It is a book of religious doctrine, but also a literary masterpiece that, in the opinion of the scholars, has reached the highest standard of eloquence and linguistic excellence.

The Qur'ān doesn't contain a clear, specific theory about the nature of God, the universe, life, or destiny in the way that we find in the books of philosophy and nature and theology. Instead, it includes a range of ideas and opinions related to God, the universe, life, and destiny. Although it is not a scientific, theological, and philosophical

[45] Surah Yusuf (12:2)
[46] Surah Al-Ma'idah (5:115)

work in the strict sense of these words, it does give philosophical, scientific, and theological thought a unique direction that would not have been pursued if it were not for the Qur'ān.

The Qur'ān's influence and impact on the shaping of the minds of Muslims, as well as its control over their feelings and emotions, is so great that every Muslim thinker, scholar, and philosopher has to take account of the Qur'ān in everything that they say, write, and do, and in all of the concepts and views that proceed from them. This is how the Qur'ān became the centre for a variety of fields.

Grammarians took their cue from the Qur'ān to derive their rules of grammar and its application. Linguists produced books and classifications about the unique words of the Qur'ān, while the jurists concerned themselves with the verses dealing with rulings on which they based their field of knowledge, just as the scholars of the principles of jurisprudence did in the laying down legal theory. Meanwhile, the theologians had a variety of established schools regarding justice, tawhid, the attributes of God, and the deeds of the servants, where, of course, they relied on what reached them of the sound knowledge from the disciplines of philosophy.

Perhaps the one who articulated this best was Al-Raghib al-Isfahani in the first part of his book, *The Characteristics*: "The words of the Qur'ān are the heart of the speech of the Arabs; its cream, its jewel, its most precious parts. On it rely the legal jurists, the judges, and rulers in their rulings and wisdoms. The masters of poetry and eloquence resort to it in their compositions and poetry. All else is but peel and pips compared to the most delicious parts of the fruit, like the chaff and straw compared to the heads of wheat."[47]

Thus, the Qur'ān has been the backbone of the Arabs and Muslims in all countries on the face of the earth, and the source of inspiration from which flows schools of thought, religion, and human society in Islam. From it, tafsir, jurisprudence, principals, theology, morality, language, mysticism, and even the dark sciences of magic and sorcery all issue. The whole attention of Muslims is consumed by memorising it, understanding it, learning it, teaching it, preaching it, guiding by it, reflecting on it, taking lesson from it, drawing culture and literature from it.

They have studied it word for word, single-mindedly and devoutly, and with unmatched piety. In fact, they have put up with it, endured it, feigned and pretended for it, to the extent that they make it say that which it doesn't say. They support it with contradictory statements and untenable doctrines, and all the while they think they are doing good. They have gone to utmost lengths in that and arrived at conclusions that "never occurred to our Lord," if such a statement has any meaning!

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*The Linguistic Beauty was the Qur'ān's Key to the Hearts of the Pre-Islamic Arabs:*

The Qur'ānic text has its own unique logic. It has its own literary and rhetorical styles that the great and good regarded as the epitome of the Arabic language.

[47] The Characteristics p.79.

Linguistic appreciation was an intrinsic part of the lives of pre-Islamic Arabs. They loved eloquence more than they loved their idols. Indeed, some despised the idols and rejected them, but none of them took this attitude towards the gods of eloquence. On the contrary, they were addicted to achieving eloquence and choosing the right word. They would strive to find the most suitable expression, and refine their poems obsessively, to an extent that hadn't been done before. For neither Al-Lat, nor Al-'Uzzá, nor even Manāt could compensate one for not being gifted with an eloquent tongue.

We don't hear about the Arabs sending their sons to places of religious seclusion, yet it was a well-established tradition to send their sons, even amongst the poor, to pure-blooded Arab wet nurses in the desert. This was done so that they would grow accustom to the pure Arab tongue, to authentic eloquence, and captivating, expressive wording. The wet nurses would come at times of festivals and feasts to take their portion of newborns to breastfeed with their own children. The infants would grow up in the bedouin way and acquire the eloquence of the bedouins and then return, having benefited and profited from the experience, brimming with the health and vigour gained from the bedouin life—not to mention with the sharpness and alertness and the quality of their language that the nomadic bedouin life had bequeathed to them.

The Qur'ān used this linguistic appreciation to construct a new form of religious appreciation. To remedy the old ways, and revive a profound spiritual vision. It was a successful strategy, even though the road was not smooth and easy. The allure, artistry, and magic of language was an essential part of the Qur'ān's strategy when interacting with the pre-Islamic Arabs, who fate wanted made ready for momentous historical tasks, and who became charged with huge responsibilities and amazing achievements that no-one would have imagined. It was an outstanding venture, of which its most important result was the doctrine of the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān.

Sometimes language can enchant one to the point of distraction from what is being said. Form can dazzle and divert from content, so that once the initial effect has passed and the person is more conscious, he has already taken in the words and assimilated them. This is well known by great orators. The care and attention the Qur'ān gives to its words and phrases is the care and attention of an inspired artist, engrossed in his art, rather than the care and attention of an academic engrossed in his quest for truth. The Qur'ān used words like alluring sirens, and then set them loose to raid and conquer hearts and minds.

The sounds of the letters take attention away from their meanings. Harmonious sounds almost turn the words into musical rhythms, yet the words do not mean much in the final analysis. The practice of turning words into music in such a way is not the frivolous practice that people indulge in for amusement; it is done to turn words into an end. And this is real frivolity. Here, everything is geared to serve the musical progression and enchanting melody.

The Arabs were amazed—at least, according to what has been related—by the speech they heard recited by a man from amongst them. It was speech that they found to be like their speech, and yet they were unable to produce the likes of it. Most of them were astonished and dumbfounded, taken by the style and arrangement of the Qur'ān and its expounding of the tales of past nations, prophets, the unseen, and details of legislation and wondrous references to the secrets of the universe.

On this basis, the Qur'ān demanded the Arabs acknowledge and accept that it is from God—and, if not, it challenged them to bring the likes of it. Their only reply was: "We have heard (the Qur'ān). If we wanted, we could say something like this. This is just fairytales of the ancients."[48] In fact, they responded with their own challenge to the Qur'ān and the Lord of the Qur'ān, for they were not convinced that the Qur'ān was from God, and they desired

[48] Surah Al-Anfal (8:31)

the plain truth. They asked for a clear sign or an indication that would prove the Qur'ān was from God, even if that sign was Him sending down punishment upon them, for they said, "O, God! If this really is the truth from You, then rain down stones on us, or bring on us some painful doom!"[49]

This was a rather embarrassing challenge for Muhammad, which put his credibility on the line. But God, as usual, did not stir. Despite their readiness to suffer punishment for the sake of truth, which they knew the importance of and needed, the Qur'ān replied with this comical evasion from the embarrassing situation that they had put the Prophet in: "God would not punish them while you (O, Muhammad) are among them."[50]

One has to admire the integrity and dignity of the people who challenged Muhammad and their keenness to get to the truth of his claims, even if it was at the expense of their own lives. They had heard the Qur'ān and the many threats it made to the past nations, threatening to bring down a severe punishment upon them when they denied their prophets. In these cases, the presence of these prophets amongst their people wasn't a barrier keeping God from sending down punishment. According to the Qur'ān, God always saves His prophets and their faithful followers one way or another…So what is preventing Him here (Most Glorious is He) from carrying out His threat while saving His beloved Muhammad, the chosen one, just like He saved previous prophets?

It appears that God didn't always carry out His threats in the past, and He cleverly got out of this one in the same way as He did in this verse: "And [recall] when We took your covenant, [O, Children of Israel, to abide by the Torah] and We raised over you the mount [saying], 'Take what We have given you firmly, and remember what is in it that perhaps you may become righteous.'"[51] But then, despite their breaking of the covenant, God favoured them with forgiveness as a bounty from Himself: "Then you turned away after that and had it not been for the favour of God upon you and His mercy, you would have been among the losers."[52] On this occasion, I have to ask: how could God accept this oath that wasn't freely made from conviction, but rather forcibly made under duress and compulsion? "We raised over you the mount [saying], 'Take what We have given you firmly!'"

Muslims consider the fact that the Jahiliyya Arabs did not challenge the Qur'ān by producing the likes of it to be proof of the Qur'ān's superiority over pre-Islamic poetry and speech. As a consequence, they regard this as proof of the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān, and the veracity of its prophet. This is the belief of the Muslims in the miraculousness of the Qur'ān.

They began to compare pre-Islamic poetry with the Qur'ān, and made it an object of criticism, disparagement, and depreciation in order to make "the word of those who disbelieved the lowest, while the word of Allah is the highest."[53] In other words, they were unable to make the greatness of the Qur'ān clear except by detracting from the value of pre-Islamic poetry. However, this is a fallacious method of appraising the worth of something, as well as an injustice, for it means the Qur'ān's greatness can only be measured by discrediting and marginalising pre-Islamic poetry.

Despite this, pre-Islamic poetry is pre-Islamic poetry. No matter how much noise and commotion its detractors make, much of it surpasses many verses of the Qur'ān. It is considered by the eloquent speakers and masters of language to be of the highest standard of the cultured Arabic tongue, and is used as the basis on which to measure Arabic usage, and a witness to grammar, regardless of whether it is apocryphal or not—real pearls do not lose their value, no matter where they are found.

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[49] Surah Al-Anfal (8:32)
[50] Surah Al-Anfar (8:33)
[51] Surah Al-Baqarah (2:63)
[52] Surah Al-Baqarah (2:64)
[53] Surah At-Tawbah (9:40)

There are verses in the Qur'ān that immediately impose themselves upon the high artistic senses, and one cannot avoid being enchanted by words that swim around a world full of delights, pleasures, desires, and temptations that tug at the heartstrings. They do that simply by their own internal strength and captivating creative power, without the need for faith or divine devotion. In this respect, there are a number of verses: 2:255; 11:44; 13:32-33; 33:41-48; 34:11-12; 41:11; 43:84; 57:12; 66:8, and 76:12-13.

Among the most outstanding verses of the Qur'ān, in my view, is when it expresses the future in the form of the past. What is meant by the future here is the Day of Judgment, and this is to evoke a sense of it actually happening, as the Mufassirun say:

وَٱلَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ وَعَمِلُواْ ٱلصَّالِحَاتِ... أُوْلَـٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ ٱلْجَنَّةِ... وَنَزَعْنَا مَا فِي صُدُورِهِم مِّنْ غِلٍّ تَجْرِي مِن تَحْتِهِمُ ٱلأَنْهَٰرُ وَقَالُواْ ٱلْحَمْدُ للَّهِ ٱلَّذِي هَدَانَا لِهَـٰذَا... وَنُودُواْ أَن تِلْكُمُ ٱلْجَنَّةُ أُورِثْتُمُوهَا بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ. وَنَادَىٰ أَصْحَابُ ٱلْجَنَّةِ أَصْحَابَ ٱلنَّارِ أَن قَدْ وَجَدْنَا مَا وَعَدَنَا رَبُّنَا حَقّاً... وَعَلَى ٱلأَعْرَافِ رِجَالٌ يَعْرِفُونَ كُلاًّ بِسِيمَاهُمْ وَنَادَوْاْ أَصْحَابَ ٱلْجَنَّةِ أَن سَلاَمٌ عَلَيْكُمْ... وَإِذَا صُرِفَتْ أَبْصَارُهُمْ تِلْقَآءَ أَصْحَابِ ٱلنَّارِ قَالُواْ رَبَّنَا لاَ تَجْعَلْنَا مَعَ ٱلْقَوْمِ ٱلظَّالِمِينَ. وَنَادَىٰ أَصْحَابُ ٱلأَعْرَافِ رِجَالاً يَعْرِفُونَهُمْ بِسِيمَاهُمْ قَالُواْ مَآ أَغْنَىٰ عَنكُمْ جَمْعُكُمْ... وَنَادَىٰ أَصْحَابُ ٱلنَّارِ أَصْحَابَ ٱلْجَنَّةِ أَنْ أَفِيضُواْ عَلَيْنَا مِنَ ٱلْمَآءِ أَوْ مِمَّا رَزَقَكُمُ ٱللَّهُ قَالُواْ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ حَرَّمَهُمَا عَلَى ٱلْكَافِرِينَ( ٧: ٤٢-٥٠)

*"And (as for) those who believe and do good[…] they are the dwellers of the garden; in it they shall abide[…] And We will remove whatever of ill-feeling is in their breasts; the rivers shall flow beneath them and they shall say, 'All praise is due to Allah, Who guided us to this'[…] and it shall be cried out to them that this is the garden of which you are made heirs for what you did. And the dwellers of the garden will call out to the inmates of the fire, 'Surely, we have found what our Lord promised us to be true'[…] and on the most elevated places there shall be men who know all by their marks, and they shall call out to the dwellers of the garden, 'Peace be on you'[…] And when their eyes shall be turned towards the inmates of the fire, they shall say, 'Our Lord! Place us not with the unjust.' And the dwellers of the most elevated places shall call out to men whom they will recognise by their marks, saying, 'Of no avail were to you your hordes'[…] And the inmates of the fire shall call out to the dwellers of the garden, saying, 'Pour on us some water or of that which Allah has given you.' They shall say, 'Surely, Allah has prohibited them both to the unbelievers.'" (7:42-50)*

On a similar level are these other sections: 18:53, 42:44-45, 57:13-14…

But are all the verses of the Qur'ān on a single level of excellence, mastery, and eloquence? By no means! The Qur'ān is not on one level of eloquence and power of expression, no matter what the long-bearded sanctimonious ones say, or those who made a career from fishing in stagnant waters—never mind the simple-minded and weak-minded believers. For indeed, I say it loud and clear, in front of witnesses: while the Qur'ān contains verses of the highest quality and beauty, it also contains others that are extremely poor, substandard, and of an embarrassingly low quality!

The veil of faith made the Qur'ānic commentators who were simple-minded blind to these weak passages. But the wise recognised their weakness, and were confused. In the end, they resorted to distortion, to the patching-up skills of the commentators' trade, which allowed them to paper over these passages. Each of them was up to the task of plugging the holes and veiling the flaws in order to repair the damage. They did all of this, without realising it, for they wanted to rescue their faith in any way they could. Then, once the Qur'ān had become so familiar, their literary appreciation and senses became dull. The Qur'ān was polished by the tongue and perpetual recitation, which made the Qur'ān become deeply-rooted in our consciousness.

Give me a madman, and from his ramblings I will extract the wisdom of the ages for you. Especially if he has a position of authority and is surrounded by those with vested interests who benefit from him in some way. Have you not heard of the hypocrisy of the court hangers-on, sycophants, advisers and retinue, each one more given to being economical with the truth than the other? For they have come upon an invaluable catch: a deluded ruler, and minds can get lost in the oceans of his teachings as thoughts fail to encompass the intentions of his words. So they make it say that which it didn't say, and pour upon it objectives that never occurred to anyone, and they vie to outdo each other. The one who comes up with the most waffle is the one who achieves the most.

This is what happens when the matter concerns the "holy" texts, in which minds and understandings get lost. Here, all sorts of aims and intentions are fabricated and attributed to the creator of the universes. Here, as a consequence, logic and reason are slaughtered as a holy sacrifice to the biggest of all idols: the holy texts.

They say that when Al-Walid ibn Mughira, one of the Meccan polytheists and one of the fiercest opponents of Muhammad, heard the Qur'ān, he was very taken by its mastery, beauty, and enchanting eloquence. I find that more than likely, as no-one recognises eloquence more than those who are, themselves, eloquent. They attribute to him these words, spoken while he was a stubborn opponent: "By God, indeed it has a sweetness and an elegance. Its topmost is fruitful, while its lowest part is abundant." And they don't stop there. No, they ascribe this dangerous comment to him: "It is not the speech of a human being!"

I repeat: I do not find it at all strange that the Qur'ān should be described as beautiful by a stubborn enemy of the Qur'ān, for it is fitting that the masters of eloquence attest to excellence when confronted by it, and put aside dispute with the one who uttered the eloquence. But I do find the last statement unlikely, for if he did say that, then what stopped him from believing in the lord of the Qur'ān, since he just accepted that the Qur'ān had this divine status? For if the Qur'ān was "not the speech of a human," then it is the speech of whom? I suspect that this last comment is the addition of the narrator (and how liberal they are with such additions), especially since al-Walid's words have been narrated in many different forms and various wordings.

If it is true that al-Walid ibn al-Mughira said what has been narrated (and I have no reason to doubt it, with the exception of the last comment), then his words only applied to some of the verses of the Qur'ān and not all of it. It mostly applies to the Meccan parts, for the majority of them are short verses with an expressive simplicity, without affectation or artificiality. On the contrary, they have a fluidity and rhythm inspired by instinct, context, and the time. These are the verses that tugged at the heart of al-Walid. Had he heard what came later of the Medinan verses with their confusion, disarray, weakness, flaws, and even vulgarity and contradiction, he would have gone back on his previous judgment, and we would have seen his complete rejection and disavowal of it.

He was very objective in his previous judgment of the Qur'ān, as he gave an honest response, despite being an opponent of Muhammad. This objectivity would give him an insight and clear vision which was denied to the believers, who were astonished by the Qur'ān. This took control of their emotions to the extent that they lost their critical thinking ability, and they became unable to see the Qur'ān as it was. They were not able to make an accurate assessment of it, nor were they able to distinguish between the fat and the lean in it.

Their senses had become dull, for faith had bequeathed them a deafness in their ears and a veil over their sight. They had become soldiers for the Qur'ān: reciting it, defending it, and being subservient to it. They were herded by faith like the shepherd herds his flock.

Truth is what the Qur'ān says. Falsehood is everything else. So the voices were launched in support of the Qur'ān, heaping praise upon and extolling the excellence of the Qur'ān. There was no talk except about the Qur'ān

and its miraculous nature. Sadly, all this has had a devastating and crippling impact on the interpretation and understanding of the Qur'ān.

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*The Work of the Exegetes of the Qur'ān:*

The exegetical endeavour that the Qur'ān generated is an endeavour of scholarship of the highest order—if only it wasn't marred by flaws that have become a focus for absurdity and idiocy. Every commentator starts from a specific viewpoint according to the principles of a specific school. Rarely do they come to the Qur'ān from a neutral point of view, so the Salafi sees in the Qur'ān that which the Mu'tazilite does not. The Sunni sees something different from the Shi'a or Khariji. Likewise, the Sufi and anagogic see in it that which the philosopher or the scientist does not.

The books of tafseer (Qur'ānic commentary) contain a great deal of vacuous speculation and extraneous material that is not worth the ink it is written with. The immense skills and talents of our commentators poured over every detail in the Qur'ān, whether big or small. How often they would strain their minds and intellects to find ingenious ways of making the Qur'ān say that which it does not say, and that never occurred to it to say? They gave one meaning a thousand meanings, and discovered it has a thousand wisdoms, and invented for it a thousand subtle points of eloquence. In fact, they discovered brand new categories of eloquence, which have nothing to do with eloquence at all, and that neither God nor His prophet intended them to have. Categories of eloquence that had never even crossed their minds.

Likewise, they drown out the errors, slip-ups, fragmentations, confusion, contradictions, and weak construction in a sea of contrived interpretations,[54] conjectures, and fabrications. Faith then endows them with a lustre of excellence, magnificence, and reverence that it doesn't deserve. It is the nature of faith to shut the windows of the mind and increase blindness upon blindness. The parts of the Qur'ān which the faithful found difficult or impossible to understand were then delivered into God's hands. God knows best what it means, and "Over every knowledgeable person is one more knowing."[55] Nor did they stop there, as they heaped upon themselves blame and accusations of ignorance, and reproached themselves in order to exonerate God from any flaw and attribute to Him every perfection.

I have absolutely no doubt of their sincerity, for they are simply unable to envisage that the word of God is anything other than the height of perfection. Therefore, if they found that it fell short of the embodiment of perfection by a little way or by a long way, they raised it up high, thinking that this shortcoming must be because of their limited vision and limited reasoning. It is simply impossible that the fault could lie with the speech of God (Glory be to God, Most High, and above that by a long way)! Thus is the habit of the believer to blame his own ignorance in order to glorify his Lord. Not one of them had the courage to criticise even one single verse of the Qur'ān. Their only concern was to waft the smell of incense over it and repair that which was broken, plug the holes, and attach meaning to that which had none!

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[54] Ta'wilat تأويلات plural of: Ta'wil - تأويل.. In Islamic theology, this usually refers to interpretations of the Qur'ān that seek to find deeper, hidden meanings, often allegorical and esoteric.

[55] "Over every knowledgeable person is one more knowing – - وفوق كلّ ذي علم عليم " This is a quote from: 12:76, which has become a common Arabic saying. Hassan al-Basri said: "There is no scholar but above him is one who knows more, until you end with Allah, Mighty and Glorious is He."

The consequence was layer upon layer of tautology and stultiloquence. Indeed, the books of tafseer are stuffed full of puerile pontification, absurdity, and rambling. The unbiased researcher must rely on a much more honest and rigorous strategy when explaining the Qur'ānic text. He must rely on one that is built upon objective critique and a dispassionate appraisal, so that one is able to distinguish the bad from the good,[56] the comely from the crass, and what is clear from what is encrypted and leaves one more than baffled.

This is what the Qur'ānic commentators did not achieve, and did not want to achieve, and were unable to achieve. There is no true critique of the Qur'ānic text, no challenging of any verses, no exercising of reason with an open and analytical spirit, free and unfettered by presuppositions. On the contrary, there is only unending defence and absolute servitude as the faithful blindly throw themselves prostrate on the ground, revealing only the extent of man's shortcomings and weakness in the face of the holy text. And this is true for any holy text, whether it be the Torah, the Gospels, or the Qur'ān.

The text: wrapping ourselves in the text, cleaving to the text, worshipping the text, wading in the seas of the text to arrive at the hidden secrets of the text. Diving into the depths of the text to pull out pearls and precious stones that are embedded within the text. All this and more are the "treasures" of the text that bequeaths to its owner nothing but feeble-mindedness and shallowness. He becomes fossilised and comatose, losing his ability to see and discriminate, losing that spark of inquisitiveness and curiosity that has inspired us throughout history to probe, poke, and peek behind the curtains. Instead, he has dissolved himself in the text, and disintegrated into nothingness.

It has destroyed the capacity to think critically and independently, as well as all ability to differentiate and make a sound judgment upon the "holy" text that would contradict the inviolability of the text. On the contrary, you see them invent hands, legs, and wings for the text in order to help it soar in the sky and escape from its flaws, and so that it can stand up when it falls. Even though these "gifted commentators" still retain their rationality and presence of mind in other fields that have nothing to do with the holy text, they lose this ability in the face of the text.

Look at al-Ghazali: how vigorously he applies reason! But he soon loses his critical ability when talking about the hoopoe bird of Sulayman, the camel of Salih, the people of Gog and Magog, and the beast that God will bring out of the earth in the end-times for a task of great importance concerning the unbelievers, so that this beast can inform them (in the Arabic language, of course): "That people did not believe in Our verses."[57]

Look at St. Augustine, this great skeptic who was a giant amongst scholars in every field before embracing Christianity! Then look at how his strength was sapped when talking about the miracles of the saints, or when he dives into the "secrets" of the trinity, crucifixion, and atonement, and what it contains of profound wisdoms and deep meanings!

When it comes to God, we are all the same: the text first, reason last. Man can be so strong, and yet so weak. The state of man is truly a marvel. The mouse and the lion both live inside this creature!

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[56] Literally: "To distinguish the impure from the pure" (ليميز الخبيث من الطيب) which is a reference to Qurān 8:37, "So that Allah may distinguish the impure from the pure." ( ليميز الله الخبيث من الطيب).

[5757] "We will bring forth for them a beast from the earth speaking to them, that people did not believe in Our verses." Quran (27:82). Al-Suyuti says in his tafseer: "When it (the beast) emerges (from the earth) it will speak to those present in Arabic and say to them that people did not believe in the Qur'ān."

God is perfect; I am deficient. God is great; I am worthless. God is pure; I am sinful. God is noble; I am ignoble. God knows; I am ignorant. God is always right; I am always wrong. Thus, God is constantly the antithesis of man.

Why does man do this to himself? Because he is unable to accept his condition as it is, with all the contradictions and conflicts. He is unable to accept a world with so much evil and tragedy that seem to have no meaning or reason. He feels the need to discover the "wisdom" that lies behind it, to believe in the invisible hand of a wise God: "and God is in full control over His affairs; but most among mankind know it not."[58] God has a plan, a wisdom, and all this confusion, conflict, tragedy, and suffering is for a wise and wonderful reason. Therefore, do not dare to oppose God's wisdom. Do not dare to rebel against God's absolute authority.

So the solution to the conflicts, flaws, and contradictions we see is that man must take the responsibility for them. He either caused them by his own hand, or is too shortsighted to understand the wisdom and majesty behind it. Meanwhile, God must be placed in a safe, high place, away from any responsibility for the evil, the suffering, the contradictions of the world.

For that reason, you will see man sacrifice himself to rescue his Lord. Or, to put it more precisely, to rescue the image he created of his Lord. He pays with himself to buy his Lord out of trouble. He blames himself to free his Lord from blame. He starves himself so his Lord will be satisfied, he is self-depreciating in order to make his Lord perfect, he lowers himself so his Lord rises high, and he wounds himself to heal his Lord. He alone is the sinner. He alone is the criminal.

God is self-sufficient and not in need of the world. If a disaster befalls man, then he must blame no-one but himself, for your Lord does not wrong a soul. It is in this way that man philosophises away affliction and suffering, giving them a meaning that doesn't belong to them so that man's hope is renewed. His Lord created everything, while he is created. God is infallible, while he is flawed. So, the slave must be devoted to the Lord, and if he is, then the Lord will become clear to the slave. In this way, both overflow with meaning, and one derives meaning and existence from the other.

The Qur'ānic commentators, collectively, are but garrulous sophists, and I shall say for the hundredth time: they do not know the meaning of true textual criticism. Their greatest concern is to affect a pedantic erudition to justify the text and defend it at any cost. If they make a false show of actual criticism, it is only carefully-directed criticism. They discuss what superficially looks like criticism, but it is only affectation in order to highlight a point they intended to make from the outset, and so it is, in fact, just disguised justification and defence. Their only concern is to find exits for that which has no exit!

They think that, by doing this, they are doing good. But they do not realise that they are truly just harming the case for faith, as though by suggesting that God has nothing to offer but such sophistry and mendacity. They are corrupting while thinking they are repairing. They are misguiding while thinking they are guiding. They are an example of the complete lack of any sort of methodical critical appreciation or objective scholarly deliberation.

Worse than that is when they have finished unloading all their gibberish and all they possess of stories and tales, and once they finish spicing and patching their vacuous metaphysical, theological, and "scientific" merchandise, they start to apologise and excuse themselves by saying, "God knows best." They don't want to confirm their

[58] Surah Yusuf (12:21)

ignorance, while at the same time they don't want to admit that they are simply making up their own speculations about the Qur'ān. For in that—if you only knew—is a terrible sin, indeed. And with God, Most High, I seek refuge! They get out of this predicament by using this amusing phrase: "And God knows best what He means, Glory to Him Most High above that which they ascribe!"

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*An Inevitable Revolution:*

We need to move from the stage of commenting on the text to the stage of a much deeper critical analysis of the text and subtext. This will help us a great deal to truly understand it. Perhaps one of the good things about the age we live in is that it has witnessed the birth of genuine textual criticism. It is our hope that this trend will embrace all "holy" texts—the Islamic ones as well as the Christian ones—for we have been left behind in this respect, as the Europeans have outstripped us by far in this field.[59]

We are still a long way off from achieving this qualitative leap of courage that would open up for us wide horizons. The naive state of religious certainty is a primitive approach that belongs to the past. The time has come for us to cross over and go beyond to what lies ahead. Or, at the very least, to reduce its effect as much as we are able to do. The traditional approach to tafseer of the Qur'an is a romantic fairy-tale approach that tells us more about the mind of the person writing the tafseer than it does about the text he's commenting on.

Firm believers of whatever sort, be they Muslim, Christian, or any other, cannot ever accept that the divine books can be subject to rigorous and scholarly criticism. The Torah, Gospels, and the Qur'ān are too sacred to be contaminated by temporal sciences and the human endeavours that the soldiers of Iblees invented to detract from the word of God. So, rather than exposing the text to rational scrutiny, the commentators sought to shield it and cover it in a veil of contrived interpretations, pouring flattering explanations upon it to hide its defects and conceal its contradictions.

Although the Arabs didn't experience something on the level of the Spanish Inquisition, they nevertheless remained entangled in a vicious and fruitless circle, albeit with a little more freedom. It is a circle of verbosity, padding, and dressing. Of overworking the text and saddling it with burdens and loads above that which it can bear, while still those who research the Qur'ān have no other aim but to highlight the eloquence of the text and the hidden

[59] That was in the 17th Century when Spinoza wrote his famous essay: "Tractatus Theologico-Politicus," which was translated into most European languages. It has also been translated into Arabic by Hassan Hanafi under the title Risala al-Lahut wa al-Siyasa which spawned some work in this area. (Hassan Hanafi is currently a professor at Cairo University and chair of the philosophy department. His liberal views on Islam, most notably expressed in his book, *An Invitation for Dialogue,* caused great controversy in Egypt and accusations of apostasy).

wisdom behind it. How great is the effort they expend to delve and get to the bottom of the text, yet how trivial and insignificant are the results they reach after having spent so long bent over and agonising over the text!

During the first generation of Muslims, the Qur'ānic discourse was a call for a complete change. It was, in its day, a revolution against rigid, archaic traditions and inherited beliefs that were widespread throughout the length and breadth of the Arabian Peninsula.

In many verses, the Qur'ān launched blistering attacks upon the way people cling to the old ways and customs of their predecessors, stubbornly adhering to them no matter how they contradicted truth. It admonished them for their shortsightedness and rigid minds, for they were a people who lived in the past, seeking from it an excuse, a crutch, and an absolute source of reference, just as we do today. Nothing delights the emotions of the reactionary more than talk of how great the past was, and of the glories of the past, and of life in the splendour of the past.

It is the revolutionary mentality alone that is capable of bringing about change and creating a climate responsive to change. This is what the Qur'ān understood well and worked towards, exemplified in the person of Muhammad, the spokesperson of the Qur'ān, and the driving force in achieving its aims and objectives. Indeed, he launched a total assault on the old mentality, wiping it from the minds of his believers and inculcating them with a new vision. This is why Islam was so successful at the time, and why it made astonishingly fast progress, exceeding all expectations.

Revolution is the product of its time and place, its environment and context. It only comes after difficult labour pains. But every age has a time when it must come to an end. There cannot be a revolution except when the time is right. After that are stages of growth, vigour, solidification, imitation, repetition, stagnation, and, finally, collapse.

The Qur'ān, during the first century of the Hijra, was a revolution. But now, it is a dead weight on the revolution. It is reactionary and counter-revolutionary. It has become the very thing it rebelled against: it has become custom, tradition, and the ways of our forefathers that are blindly and stubbornly adhered to, even though they have long become obsolete. It has deeply entrenched within us habits and patterns of behaviour and ways of thinking that have become a stumbling block to all efforts for progress in our countries.

Who will bring us a new Qur'ān to overturn the old Qur'ān, and pull it up by its roots so that we can distance ourselves from the worn-out traditions and mentality of our predecessors? A new Qur'ān that would angrily scold us for stubbornly clinging to old traditions and inherited customs like a sick person clings to his blankets? A new Qur'ān that would take on the task of completely cleansing us of the need to blindly follow the idols of our forefathers, just like the first revolution cleansed its generation? That would heal us of the centuries of accumulated deadweight and legacies from the periods of decline and stagnation? It would wake us up from this nightmare of delusions and putrid decay that slams the door of the present in our faces, and would help us take the first step on the road of a thousand miles to the future, and a bright new dawn and a better life.

The Qur'ān remains a stumbling block to our full participation in the progress and changes mankind has made in recent history. Whereas the West has witnessed a revolution in the way holy texts are perceived, releasing them from their shackles and separating church from state, we have been completely unable to change the way we view our holy text, and have been left stranded. The contrast between a secular society that is dynamic, free, and open to change, and a society that is backward, stagnant, and one that, apart from just doing the same things and repeating

itself, is idle, is a truly disgraceful and shameful state of affairs. While the classical stage of our history was dynamic and potent, able to give and take, create and innovate, investigate and examine, our present stage is characterised by apathy, stagnation, and blind, regressive fundamentalism that is not proficient in anything apart from the language of intolerance, violence, blood and death. This language is taking us deeper into the darkness.

The sap has become dry, ambition withered, and desire faded. Innovation is a dirty word, and the doors of ijtihad have closed, never to open again. Fruitful fields of scientific study have been abandoned, and, little-by-little, its place has been taken by the ideology of resignation, fatalism, superstition, and passive reliance upon the supernatural.

This was not due to theological censorship, as with the ecclesiastical authority in medieval Christianity,[60] but rather was due to the disintegration of the social and political frameworks of the Arab and Islamic world, as well as the decline of the intellectual and spiritual trends starting from the 11th and 12th centuries. From that time, the reactionary "Madrasah" education system spread throughout Zawiyas, Tekkes and Ribats,[61] and, from there, popular forms of religion and practises spread amongst the masses, including things like the belief in saints, miracles (كرامات), and various other superstitions. At the same time, the link to the rational, scientific, and intellectual heritage of the productive and positive era of our history was severed. The Qur'ān had lost the spark that ignited its fire; it had lost its inner drive, its dynamics, and its ability to bring about change and renewal. It had lost contact with the march of time and the spirit of the age, and, as a consequence, it lost its relevance and qualitative function in reality and progress.

The Qur'ān retained many of the rites and rituals that had been prevalent in the Arabian Peninsula, such as the sanctification of the black stone, the rituals of Hajj, beliefs about jinn and Arabian past nations, and so on. It gathered these disparate pre-Islamic materials together, breathing new life into them, reconstructing and merging them into a new ideological edifice. It then added new elements and effective references to nature and the current knowledge of the time to advance its case in various areas of life. Then, with the decline in the tide of intellectual thought and the steady decline of our culture, this edifice began to crumble and return to rubble. Whereas, for the first generation, it had been a dynamic mechanism of practical use, it became a crumbled relic that we worshipped, glorified with praises, and presented sacrifices, vows, and incense to.

Then, the shock of modernity came banging at our door, violently intruding into our comatose state with the campaign of Napoleon.[62] We woke up in a panic at the sound of the marching feet of the military. Some of us preferred to bury our heads in the sand and live in the dreams of the past, while others were happy to just stand and stare, astonished at what was happening in front of them, mouths wide open, unable to believe their own eyes. However, a rare few began to contemplate, investigate, and explore matters in different ways.

This one said, "Go back to the fundamentals," and this one said, "Challenge the fundamentals and engage with modernity and the intellectual currents," while this one says, "Reconcile the two views, and let's awake from our lethargy and apathy." This one calls for openness towards the "other," this one calls for isolationism and destruction of the "other," and this one stands between to moderate. This one calls for innovation, this one blames innovation, this one demands to be followed, while this wants to follow, although following, in his view, cannot be without

[60] Yes, there is effective fundamentalist censorship in this arena, but such censorship is as a result of backwardness and not the cause of it, while the ecclesiastical censorship was one of the three dominant forces in the Latin Middle Ages: King, Church and Feudalism. It is, then, the cause and not the result. While our fundamentalism is one of the consequences of backwardness, their clergy were a cause of backwardness. So they are not the same.

[61] Zawiya, Tekke, Ribat, and also Khanqah are all types of Sufi lodges or religious schools, used for devotion, contemplation, and asceticism, comparable perhaps to monasteries in Christianity.

[62] A reference to Napoleon Bonaparte's campaign in Egypt, which was aimed at protecting French trade and undermining Britain, but which also included 167 scientists and scholars. Their inclusion reflected Napoleon's enthusiasm for the principles of the Enlightenment, which he sought to spread while ordering his troops to respect the religion and customs of the Egyptians, who he hoped to win over as allies.

innovation, and so on…This controversy has been going on for more than a century now, and it doesn't look like it's going to stop. If it had been a chicken, it would have produced an egg by now; if a rooster, it would have crowed!

This is the historical tragedy in which we live today, which is incessantly complicated and magnified by the planting of Israel in the region, exacerbating the situation and inflaming passions and distorting the discourse. Things have reached such a level of crisis and confusion that we don't know what we want, and we want that which we don't know. We have succumbed to a wide range of religious, mythical, and magical superstitions, as well as to stark social, economic, and cultural disparities. Furthermore, we have submitted to unbearable political despotism, and a pitiful, backward intellectual state. All of this contradicts political, dynamic, and economical freedom. It stifles the creative ability and a balanced historical perspective, and stifles our will to change, progress, and develop.

The worst thing that has happened to us today is our disastrous relationship with the world around us. We are still trying to live according to decaying cultural modes and extinct forms of civilisation.

Islam is not the solution. It once was, a long time ago. But times are different, and the world is no longer as it was. Islam is preventing us from finding a solution. It is a stumbling block on the road to a solution. I do not see any need for us to keep renewing the creed of polytheism by constantly going around the Ka'ba, doing the Sa'y, making sacrifices, kissing the black stone, and hurling the jamarat to smash the head of Iblees, who really should have died by now.

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*The Belief of Muslims in the Miraculous Nature (of the Qur'ān):*

"Say: 'If the whole of mankind and jinn were to gather together to produce the like of this Qur'ān, they could not produce the like thereof, even if they backed up each other with help and support.'"[63]

The Qur'ān is indeed a unique book. It is prose, and yet unlike prose. It is poetry, and yet unlike poetry. It is metered and rhyming, and yet it is not like the standard meters or rhymes. So, what is it, then? It is the Qur'ān, and that's it!

Perhaps the best description of the Qur'ān is that which the late Dean of Arabic Literature, Dr. Ta Ha Hussain, said: "The Genres of Arabic expression are poetry, prose, and Qur'ān," for the Qur'ān is not poetry—no! And it is not prose, either. It is a type of speech that is of a singular nature, unique of its kind. It is the Qur'ān! For that reason, the scholars are united in the opinion that what is called the "miraculous nature of the Qur'ān" is its amazing composition.

Miraculousness (al-'Ijaaz) in the Arabic language comes from "to make unable." In other words, it attributes the inability to another, and a miracle is called a miracle because mankind is unable to replicate it.

The scholarly discipline focused on the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān was a discipline that was an innovation in religion. The concept reached its full maturity in the 4th century of the Hijra, when it became independent and grew into a discipline in its own right. Today, it is a fundamental tenet of faith that no-one can dare cast doubt upon. Beginning in the 4th century of the Hijra, the discipline of the miraculous nature appeared indelibly written in stone. Despite that, there were those who cast doubt on this belief, going right back to the first centuries of Islam.

Perhaps the first of these skeptics was al-Ja'd ibn Dirham, tutor to Marwan ibn Muhammad, the last of the Umayyad Caliphs. He was the first one to openly express skepticism of the Qur'ān, and to attempt its refutation. He had said that its eloquence was not a miracle, and that people can do the like of it and better, when no scholar before him had made such claims. Marwan, who was nicknamed "the donkey," used to follow his view to the extent that he was linked to him, and called "Marwan al-Ja'di."[64]

During the mid-Abbasid period, the view that the Qur'ān was not a miracle spread along with other views of a similar nature, such as the view that the Qur'ān was created. The views of its opposition—the belief that it was not created, but eternal, on the "Protected Tablet"—also spread.

The first to go to great lengths in that was 'Isa ibn Sabih, known as Abu Musa al Mirdar, who was one of the Mu'tazilite scholars, and among the leading ones. He was called the "Monk of the Mu'tazilites," and differed from the rest of the Mu'tazilites in all of the issues that concern us here. He said, in regards to the Qur'ān, that people are able to produce the like of this Qur'ān in terms of eloquence, composition, and rhetorical beauty.[65]

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[63] Surah Al-Isra (17:88)
[64] See: Mustafa Sadiq Al-Rafi'i, "The Miraculous Nature of the Qur'ān and the Prophetic Rhetoric."p. 160.
[65] Al-Baghdadi, "The Difference Between the Groups"pages 164-165; and Al-Shahrastani, "The Book of Sects and Creeds", 1 / 68-69.

Similar to that view was the view taken by his contemporary, Ibrahim Ibn Sayyar Ibn Hani' al-Nazzam, who expounded many of the works of the philosophers and combined their ideas with the ideas of the Mu'tazilites.[66] But he differed from his colleagues in thirteen matters, while Al-Baghdadi differed in twenty-one.

If al-Shahrastani labels the areas al-Nazzam differed from his colleagues as "issues," these "issues" become "shameful scandals" in the view of al-Baghdadi! The ninth issue that al-Shahrastani reproaches al-Nazzam about becomes "The 25th shameful scandal of his shameful scandals," according to the wording of al-Baghdadi. "His view regarding the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān is to do with the fact it predicts events of the past and future, and the fact it diverted the causes of opposition and prevented the Arabs—by force and incapacitation—from being concerned with trying to imitate it, because if Allah let them, then they could have produced a Surah equal in beautiful rhetoric, eloquence, and composition." The idea that mankind was able to produce the likes of the Qur'ān, but Allah diverted mankind from doing so by hindering them, is called "The View of Diversion."

Now, we ask: what is the nature of the miraculousness of the Qur'ān?

The scholars of Arabic—especially the scholars of language and elegant speech—are almost completely united in the belief that the Qur'ān is, in itself, a miracle. They believe that its miraculousness is in its wonderful composition, in the eloquence of its expressions, in the astounding nature of its clear speech, and in its unique style that is unlike any other style. It is also in its captivating verbal impact, which reveals itself in its acoustic structure, linguistic beauty, and sublime artistry.

Al-Qadi Abu Bakr (d. 1148) said the nature of the miraculousness of the Qur'ān is in its composition, arrangement, and structure. He claimed that it is beyond all types of standard composition in the language of the Arabs, departing from their styles of oration, and, for this reason, they were unable to oppose it. The composition of the Qur'ān had no model to imitate, nor any antecedent to emulate, and he believed that it is unreasonable to think that the likes of it could happen by chance. He said, "The miraculousness of the Qur'ān is much clearer in some parts, while in some parts it is more subtle and more obscure."[67]

Al Imam Fakhr al-Din (d. 1210) said the nature of the miraculousness is its eloquence and unique style, free from all defects.

Al-Zamalkani (d. 727h) said the nature of the miraculousness derives from the composition that is unique to it, and is not haphazard. He believed that its words are finely balanced in construction, in meter, and the reason behind the way it has been put together in meaning, so that every word occurs in the best possible place for its pronunciation and meaning.

Ibn Atiyya said, "The correct opinion, and the one that laymen and experts are agreed upon, is that its miraculousness, derives from its composition, the soundness of its meanings, and in the arrangement and eloquence of its wording. And that is because Allah's knowledge surrounds all things and surrounds all aspects of language. So, since the organisation of the wording in the Qur'ān is something His knowledge completely surrounds (each word perfectly suits the one it follows and each meaning is elucidated after another, and that is the case from beginning to end of the Qur'ān), and man is encompassed by ignorance, bewilderment, and perplexity, and it is self-evident that no human being encompasses all knowledge, then, as a result, the arrangement of the Qur'ān is the epitome of eloquence. For that reason, one destroys the sayings of those who claim that the Arabs were able to replicate the likes of it, or

[66] Al-Shahrastani, 1 / 35-45.
[67] Quoted from the previous reference, p. 122

that they were 'diverted' from doing so. The correct opinion is that it was not within the ability of anyone to reproduce—ever!"[68]

But the scholars disagree about the different degrees of eloquence displayed by the verses of the Qur'ān, after having agreed that the Qur'ān is the highest form of eloquence insofar as one cannot find phrasing that is more suitable or balanced to convey its meaning.

Al-Qadi takes the opinion of "negation," meaning a negation of any difference in degrees of eloquence in the Qur'ān. He believed that every word in the Qur'ān is in its highest form, even though some people are better at sensing it than others.

Meanwhile, Abu al-Qushairy and others took the opinion of "difference" in degrees of eloquence, saying, "We do not claim that everything in the Qur'ān is in the highest rank of eloquence." And, likewise, others have said, "In the Qur'ān is both the *eloquent* and the *most eloquent*." This is the opinion taken by Sheikh 'Izz al-Din 'Abd al-Salam, who then asked: "Why was the Qur'ān not entirely in the most eloquent form?"

Al-Sadr Mawhoob al-Jazari attempted to answer this question by saying, "If the Qur'ān had come entirely in the most eloquent form, it would not be in the usual style of human speech, which contains the most eloquent along with the eloquent, and that would mean it would not be a valid challenge. It had to come in their usual style of speech to highlight their inability to challenge it, so the critics could not say, for example: 'You have brought that which we have no ability in its like. Just as it would not be right for a sighted person to say to a blind person, 'I beat you by virtue of my sight,' because the blind person will say to him: 'Your victory can only be valid if I was able to see, and then you could say your sight was better than mine. But if I lack the ability to see, then how can I make a challenge?'"[69]

In any case, the Qur'ān is, in the eyes of Muslims, the Prophet's greatest miracle. No falsehood in it, either before or behind it. "Indeed, everything in the Qur'ān is a miracle. In respect to the music of its letters, the kinship between its wording, the synchronicity of its words with its expressions, with the well-knit arrangement in its resonance, and that which it arrives at in regards to composition between the words, and the fact that every word intentionally fits its counterpart. It is as though the weave of each part perfects its picture and completes its objective. Its meanings coalesce with its words as though its meanings are related to its pronunciations, and its pronunciations were designed for it, and made to fit its size."[70]

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[68] All these quotes are taken from the previous reference, p. 133 with some slight edits in wording but not meaning.
[69] The previous reference, p. 109
[70] The previous reference, p. 99

*What Kind of Miraculousness is it?:*

Now we say, "Indeed, the belief in the miraculousness of the Qur'ān is no more than a myth amongst myths." Indeed! The Qur'ān is not amongst the secrets of the gods. It does not bear the slightest relation to divine inspiration that would take it outside the normal activity of human history. It is a purely human achievement which follows the norms of humanity in strength and weakness, correctness and error, agreement and contradiction, cohesion and disparity, consistency and inconsistency, uniformity and disarray.

The Qur'ān is a very ordinary book. For that reason, it is necessary to remove it from its safe refuge outside of human history, and return it to the world of people. After that, it will no longer be storehouse for timeless wisdom, nor a divine book that is protected from error, that no falsehood can approach from either front or behind. But will instead return to where it belongs in its time and context and will become part of the historical process of the area which has witnessed (and continues to witness) comparable books.

Every star-struck believer, regardless of whether he is from the common people or their elite, or even from the elite of the elite, relies on the belief that "in the Qur'ān, due to beauty of the words and the splendour of the style especially, no-one can attain the phrases, style and meanings."[71] And they believe in the challenge that Allah announced in the Qur'ān for man and jinn to bring the like of this Qur'ān forth: "Say: 'If the whole of mankind and jinns were to gather together to produce the likes of this Qur'ān, they could not produce the like thereof, even if they backed up each other with help and support.'" (17:88)

This claim is absolutely true, but it doesn't apply only to the Qur'ān. It also applies to every great work, for just as man and jinn are not able to produce the like of the Qur'ān, they cannot produce the like of that which Plato brought, nor al-Jahiz, nor al-Tawhidi, nor Dante, nor Goethe, nor Shakespeare...

Great works always contain the fingerprints of their authors. It is a part of their identity. So if it is impossible to imitate these fingerprints, then it is also impossible to imitate these works. Each one is a unique weave that has no match in the works of man, and has an established character. Despite this, none of them are free from flaws and errors and defects that the critic can be aware of. The same is true of the Qur'ān. In the works of al-Jahiz and al-Tawhidi is that which far surpasses what is in some of the verses of the Qur'ān, as we shall see. But who dares to criticise the Qur'ān?

Indeed, the Muslims of the Middle Ages during the Golden Age had more freedom than Muslims in the current time. If not, then why does no-one dare, like al-Sarakhsi and ibn Rawandi and al-Razi, to defame the most holy symbol of Muslims, the most valuable of valuables that gives meaning to their existence, and bestows on them hope and immortality?

All efforts and active forces in the Islamic world have been enlisted to repel the "Enemies of Allah." Criticism of Allah's book has been met with a reception that varies from forbearance and irritation to insult and vilification, suppression and temperance. Methods of "dealing" with the critics ranged from chit-chat and bluster to finding excuses and haphazard solutions—or, as I, myself, call it: "the patching up of the holes"—in order to save the word of Allah from the clutches of the deniers, the astray, and the ones who lead others astray.

[71] Muhammad Abu Zahra, "The Greatest Miracle."

The efforts of the Islamic world are wasted on hitting and slapping, punching and physical eradication, seeking closeness to Allah through the blood of the insolent fabricator of lies about Allah. They seek His closeness through the blood of the denier of His signs, so that he be a warning to his like: the forces of the Devil and the seducers. "And Satan indeed found his calculation true concerning them, for they followed him..." "Then, they topple into the Fire of Hell, all of them together."[72] They are the ones who Allah curses, 'and those who curse, curse them!'

Indeed, opposing the Qur'ān was a natural process that arose with the rise of Islam, but the new religion killed the opposition in the cradle—or, at least, it was able to silence it for a while. That was after the astounding victory that Islam achieved in the Arabian Peninsula and the area surrounding it. Indeed, it was such a tremendous breakthrough that it temporarily diverted attention away from that which interplays in the Qur'ān of opposing forces and deep contradictions that don't appear on the surface, except in moments of quiet and stability, or at the times of fitna.

It is no surprise, then, that this process (of opposing the Qur'ān) started anew or returned to the open when the Umayyad dynasty began to disintegrate and approach its end. For Islam had injured the pride of many of the conquered people. This movement became known as the Shu'ubiyyah (a popularist movement against Arab domination). Nationalist pride overtook them, and drove them to fanaticism for the religion of their forefathers, such as Zoroastrianism and Manichean dualism. They developed a hatred towards Islam because it had ended their glory and destroyed their dreams. A group of poets who belonged to "The League of the Mujjan" (a group of libertine or dissident intellectuals such as Bashar ibn Burd and Abu Nuwas) joined them, fleeing from the constraints of religion, and seeking a life of freedom with no restrictions or regulations.

Then came the Abbasid period, where the Shu'ubiyya movement was active alongside the Heretical movement (Harakat al-Zandaqa), and the attacks on Islam intensified, as did the disparagement of its holiest of holies: the Qur'ān.

At the head of this movement were poets, satirists, and disaffected thinkers. Amongst the most famous of them were Salih ibn Abdul Quddus, Abdul Karim ibn Abu al "Awjaa," Abu 'Isa al-Warraq, Bashar ibn Burd and his adversary, Hammad Ajrad, Iban ibn Abdul Hamid al-Lahiqi, Ibn Muqaffa', Muhammad ibn Abdullah ibn Muqaffa', and Abd-al-Masih al-Kindi, who we shall say a few words about in a little while, to show the participation of non-Muslims in the attacks on the Qur'ān.

But the most famous of all these, without argument, are Abu al-Hussein Ahmad ibn Yahya ibn Ishaq al-Rawandi and Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Zakariyya al-Razi. Both were prominent figures while the movement of Heretics reached its climax and furthest extent. We will now discuss each of them briefly—long enough to clarify what we mean.

At first, the Dissident Movement, or the Movement of Heretics, was simply a spontaneous individual attitude, a libertine outburst, or a transient intellectual position. However, this movement quickly began to manifest itself and crystallize with the passing of time, until it became a comprehensive school of thought based on the pillars of reason. It acquired supporters who believed in the movement, and who worked to publicise and disseminate its principles. This movement continued to grow and rise until it reached its apex under ibn al-Rawandi. His view of

[72] Allusion to what is related in Sura al Shu'araa' 26/94.

prophethood formed the cornerstone of the barrage on the Qur'ān by these Heretics, although without extending to doubt in the existence of Allah, who had revealed the Qur'ān.

To establish the doubt of prophethood was the furthest extent that this movement of Heretics achieved in Islam. It then it came to a halt after a violent shake-up in concepts and doctrines grew out of it in the 4th century of Hijra, which drew towards it the movements of the concealed ideologies that were influenced by Gnosticism and Esoteric Knowledge, and especially those associated with the Shi'ism (the Isma'iliyyah Shi'ism, in particular).

Ibn Rawandi was the most famous of the dissenters of the 3rd century of Hijra, although only a little is known about him; even the dates of his birth and death are not known for certain. He was originally a Mu'tazilite from a non-orthodox Sunni school of thought. He later recanted and began to lean towards Shi'ism, becoming a strong critic of the Mu'tazilites.

He was a vehement believer in reason, praising it and relying on it in all matters and affairs. Reason, in his opinion, was "The greatest gift bestowed by God, glorified is He, upon His creation. Indeed, it is through it that the Lord and His blessings can be known, and by virtue of it that His orders and prohibitions, His promises and threats become valid."[73]

He wrote a book called *The Scandal of the Mu'tazilah*,[74] which was a critical analysis of the Mu'tazilite school of thought from the perspective of the Shi'ah al-Rafidah, and a reply to the book of al-Jahiz, *The Virtue of the Mu'tazilah*. But this period did not last long, and we see him after that amongst the group of those who the author of the *The Catalogue*, ibn al-Nadim, called: "Theologians who manifest Islam, but conceal heresy." He was influenced in this way by Abu 'Isa al-Warraq, who was a teacher of his, and who encouraged him towards heresy.

Ibn Rawandi began his heretical writings in the latter years of his life, and they are the books that he owes his importance and high status to. Among these books is one where he dealt a massive blow to the Qur'ān, which he entitled *The Crushing Blow*. It was, as its title suggests, a merciless attack on the Qur'ān.

A third book attributed to him is *The Emerald*, where he refutes the concept of prophethood in Islam, and attacks the belief in the miraculousness of the Qur'ān. I say that this book is "attributed to him" due to a reference that has claimed the book was written by al-Jaba'iy. This reference goes on to say: "Indeed, ibn al-Rawandi and Abu 'Isa Muhammad ibn Harun al-Warraq, the heretic, also dispute with one another over the book of *The Emerald*, each one claiming that it is amongst their compilations, as both were in complete accordance with the attacking of the Qur'ān."[75]

In the first and third parts of this book, ibn al-Rawandi (or Abu 'Isa al-Warraq) presents his opinion on reason and on religions that depend on revelation, and he explains his position on each. He begins his book with the subject of human reason, praising it and celebrating it as the only path to enlightenment. His opponents must agree with him that reason is the mightiest thing that man possesses, and is the sole refuge to solve problems, indeed! "The Prophet bore witness to the high status and majesty of Reason."[76]

Therefore, let us agree that reason should be used to analyse the concept of prophethood. Either the teachings of the Prophet agree with reason, in which case there is no need for prophecy since reason is sufficient, or the teachings contradict reason, in which case they are false. For that reason, Ibn al-Rawandi was surprised at

[73] Quote from Dr. Abd al Rahman Badawi, "History of Disbelief in Islam", page 202.
[74] See the previous reference, pages 87, 186 and following.
[75] Quote from the previous reference, pp. 112 and 182.
[76] Quote from the previous reference, pp. 186-187.

Muhammad's position, and wondered: "Why did he bring that which negates him if he was authentic?"[77] The revelation of Muhammad is in complete opposition to reason. Then what is the meaning of these obligatory religious injunctions upon the Muslim, such as ritual washing and ritual prayer, circumambulating around the Ka'abah, and visiting the holy sites?

Regarding that, ibn al-Rawandi says, "Indeed, the Prophet brought that which contradicts reason, such as ritual prayer, ritual cleansing from impurity, throwing stones at pillars during Hajj, and walking around a house that cannot hear nor see, or dashing between two rocky mounds that can neither benefit nor harm them. All of this has nothing to do with reason. So what is the difference between the hills of Safa and Marwa, and the hills of Abu Qubays and Hira? And walking 'round the holy house is no different than walking 'round any other houses.'"[78]

Ibn al-Rawandi used the myths of the Brahmins to express his bold views. He used them as the means with which to attack "divinely-revealed" religions and laws (since it is easier for Muslims to recognise the superiority of using reason in relation to the claims of 'divine inspiration' made by other faiths) so he could express his belief about Islam beneath this veil. He made these attacks in the form of analogies for the necessity of reason and intellect, so that they could be set free of their own accord and express the views and thoughts that naturally spring from them, while directing them at delusional characters to soften their blows upon the audience.

In this vein, and in the name of reason (which he never ceases to praise and extol even for a moment), he goes on to attack the Qur'ān in *The Emerald*. In this book, he reviews the concept of the miraculousness of the Qur'ān and criticises it ruthlessly, annihilating the view that the Qur'ān is of divine origin. He puts forward a simple, concrete, logical, and reasoned view with no ambiguity in it, convincing the intelligent of the human nature of the Qur'ān, and refuting those who say that it is an inspiration from Allah and a revelation from an all-wise and all-knowing entity.

It is also related that, regarding refuting the belief in the miraculousness of the Qur'ān, ibn al-Rawandi had said, "Indeed, it is not impossible that one Arab tribe is more eloquent than all the other tribes, and that a group of people in this tribe are more eloquent than others in this tribe, and that one member of this group is more eloquent than the rest of this group… and suppose that his eloquence was spread amongst the Arabs…so what is its wisdom upon the non-Arabs, who do not understand the Arabic language? What is the proof for the divinity of the Qur'ān for them?"[79]

Additionally, ibn al-Rawandi mocked the theatrical spectacle of the angels that Allah sent down from Heaven during the battle of Badr to help the Prophet. He said, "They had limited effect, little power, and despite their great number and the combination of them and the Muslims, they could not kill more than 70 people... And where were the angels during the battle of Uhud, when the prophet was skulking in fear amongst the slain? Why didn't Allah help him in that situation by sending the angels?"[80]

In *The Emerald,* ibn al-Rawandi also quoted from *The Victory*, by Al Khayyat: "Indeed, the Qur'ān is not the speech of a wise god. In it are contradictions and mistakes and passages that are in the realms of the impossible."[81] An example is in the theatrical episode of the angels of Badr that we just mentioned.

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[77] Quote from the previous reference, p. 84.
[78] Quote from the previous reference,pp. 101-102. Abu Qubais and Hira are mountains in Makkah
[79] Quote from the previous reference, p. 87.
[80] Quote from the previous reference, p. 87.
[81] Quote from the previous reference, p. 110.

Ibn al-Rawandi finds in the discourse of Aktham ibn Sayfi better language than in the Qur'ān that boasts, "Verily, We have given you the Abundance."[82] As ibn al-Jawzi says in his brief allusion to *The Emerald*, "Then he begins with attack on the Qur'ān and claims the existence of linguistic mistakes in it."[83]

Ibn Jawzi's book, *Al Muntathim fi al-Tarikh*, quotes the following criticisms from *The Crushing Blow*: "When Muhammad described (in the Qur'ān) Paradise, he said, 'In it are rivers of laban, whose taste has not gone off, and that is milk, yet no one desires that apart from the hungry.' And he mentioned honey that no-one wants at all, and ginger, which is not tasty except as a drink. He describes silk brocade (sundus) which is used as a spread, not as clothes, and, likewise, he describes embroidered brocade (Istabriq), which is a thick and rough type of silk brocade. He said one who imagines himself in Paradise wearing this rough clothing and drinking milk and ginger will be like a bride in a Kurdish or Nabataean wedding!"[84]

Ibn al-Rawandi turns his attention to the divine challenge to bring the likes of the Qur'ān forth, saying: "If you want the likes of it in respect to superior speech, we can bring you a thousand like it from the speech of the masters of rhetoric, from the champions of eloquence and poetry, and it shall be more fluent in wording, and it will more concisely convey its meanings, and the words shall be more elegantly-rendered and expressed and more beautifully-rhymed. And if you are not content with that, then we demand from you the same that you demand from us!"[85]

"Even the Mu'tazilah, who reject all miracles (or at least attach no importance to them), still tend to believe in the miracle of the Qur'ān.[86] But al-Nazzam, who was the most bold and freethinking of the Mu'tazilite theologians, rejected the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān in regard to its composition. He also rejected the miracles of our Prophet (peace be upon him), such as the splitting of the moon, the pebbles in his hand glorifying God, the gushing of water from his fingers. He then went from rejection of the miracles of our Prophet (peace be upon him), to the rejection of his prophethood."[87]

This attack on Islam was not restricted to the apostate Muslims. Non-Muslims also entered the ranks of the critics, galvanized by the fury of the fierce offensive being waged on the new religion. Perhaps the most famous of these (whose quotes have reached us) was the philosopher, Abd al-Masih ibn Ishaq al-Kindi (not to be confused with the well-known Muslim philosopher also called al-Kindi). He was a Nestorian Christian who reportedly lived in the courtyard of the Caliph, al-Ma'mun. This was due to al-Ma'mun's openness towards those who differed from him in views and belief (al-Ma'mun was famous for gathering opposing sects and religions to hear them debate), helping him tolerate ferocious criticism directed by this Christian against the rituals of Islam and its beliefs, especially the rites of Hajj.

His views that concern us here are his explanation for the effect of the Qur'ān: "The Nabataeans, the rabble, the non-Arabs, the gullible, and the ignorant who have no understanding of the Arabic language, are the only ones who would be duped by the claim of the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān in respect to its composition."[88]

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[82] Quote from the previous reference, p. 111. (108/1)
[83] Quote from the previous reference, p. 120.
[84] Quote from the previous reference, p. 133
[85] Quote from the previous reference, p. 216
[86] Quote from the previous reference,pp. 119 and 153.
[87] Al Baghdadi, "The Difference Between the Groups", p. 132; see also pp. 149-150.
[88] Quote from Dr. Badawi, "The History of Disbelief in Islam," p. 129.

Al-Razi is the second of the two, who, without rival, courageously barged his way over the red line. Many before hovered close, but never quite hit the mark, either because of their fear or lack of resources. As for al-Razi, and ibn al-Rawandi before him, they are the indisputable masters of the field. Indeed, all those who attempted to reply to them could not match them—not at all! They were not on their level. They were dwarfs who cannot be compared to either of them.

Each of these two was a revolutionary, a rebellious visionary, who revealed concealed thoughts, brought out pent-up feelings, and freed suppressed minds. They both thought the thoughts that were not thought about—that were not *allowed* to be thought about. Each would not accept anything less than making the most holiest of holies an object of criticism the same as every other concept.

They delved into it to uncover its flaws, and to disgrace its myths and illusions. They worked to expose its threats, claims, and hearsay by which man is crushed. They wished to expose the devices that paralyze man's abilities and enslave him to supernatural powers and invisible entities, as these devices rob and intimidate man like an unsheathed sword hanging over his head, not allowing him any room to move to see what is beyond his nose, or to learn what is going on around him. Thus he must live his life hostage to the fears, anxieties, whisperings, and misgivings that come between him and achieving his best potential, destroying all of his ambitions of self-realization and personal freedom.

Al-Razi was a philosopher, doctor, and alchemist of the highest order, just as he was the pillar of the dissident and heretical movement during his age and the following centuries. If there was a difference between him and ibn al-Rawandi, then it was in the degree of depth and width of the details, and in his ability to generate new ideas from old ones. Both men believed and relied upon reason, and both based their judgments and conclusions upon reason. In their mutual opinion, reason was the yardstick with which man could measure everything.

If ibn al-Rawandi, in his heretical and irreligious meditations, worked within a similar atmosphere to that of the Muslim theologians, then "Al-Razi attacked and criticised the shortcomings of religion from the perspective of Philosophy."[89]

In the same way of ibn al-Rawandi, who used the Brahmins as a vehicle to disguise his views and to place on their tongues what was really in his own mind regarding the invalidity of prophethood and the virtues of reason, al-Razi also attributed to reason not just the ability to arrive at ethical behaviour, as ibn al-Rawandi did, but also to obtain knowledge of divine matters. "Through reason, we arrive at knowledge of the Creator, Mighty and Glorified is He."[90] There is no justification for prophethood when reason can lead us to all that is ethical and unethical. In any case, ibn al-Rawandi "…Moved in theological and religious field of study, whereas al-Razi moved in the scientific field."[91]

In summary, there is no doubt that ibn al-Rawandi blazed the trail and opened the way, but al-Razi watered it and boarded it with palm trees, beautified it with flowers and scented herbs, and raised upon it a lofty edifice.

Al-Razi praised reason "Using language which surpasses that used by the great rationalists of all ages, even in the modern age," as Abd al-Rahman confirmed in his aforementioned book. By virtue of reason, man is in no need of

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[89] Quote from the previous reference, p. 127
[90] Quote from the previous reference, p. 203.
[91] Quote from the previous reference, p. 217.

prophethood, nor religion, nor any of the "divine books," and, as a consequence, he has no need of the Qur'ān. By virtue of reason and reason alone, we can know good from bad and truth from falsehood. There is no authority other than the authority of reason, nor any belief other than belief in reason...and if this is its magnitude, then we must never minimise its value, nor reduce its status, and never make it a subject when it is the master.

Prophethood was al-Razi's overriding concern; he demolished it on the basis that reason has no need for it. He said, "From whence did you make it necessary that God singled out a people for prophethood instead of another? Preferring them over other people? Gave them evidences which forced others to be in need of these people? And from whence did you allow in the wisdom of the Wise that He chooses that for them, and raises some over others, confirming enmity between them, increasing wars and the annihilation of people?"[92]

We are not so concerned here that al-Razi heaps criticism and abuse on prophethood and prophets in great detail. What concerns us is his criticism of religions more broadly, which we can then see applied to the Qur'ān specifically. We see him turning his attention to "revealed" religions and the books that such religions ascribe divinity to. He analyses such religions without bias, favouritism, or discrimination, for all are of equal importance to the analysis.[93]

Al-Razi's disbelief was not aimed at a specific religion over another; it was not aimed at Islam alone. This highlights the objectivity and soundness of his opinion, for all religions were subject to his critical attack.

The religions do not say the same things, and they contradict one another, despite the fact they claim to come from the same source, and all claim that they are free from defects and lies. But how can that be the case when they all contain absurdities and contradictions?

Here, an adversary poses the following question: If religions are as you say, then how can we explain the adherence of the masses to them? Al-Razi responds to this objection by saying that the followers of the various religions have taken the religion from their leaders by way of imitation.

They are prevented from questioning or scrutinizing the foundations, and are told tales that discourage them from questioning these foundations. Whoever contravenes this prevention of questioning is accused of Kufr (disbelief). If the religious leaders are asked to prove the truth of what they say, they fly into a rage and spill the blood of the one who demands that proof of them. Then came a period of long familiarity, the passing of time, the acquaintance and deception of the people by the goat-bearded clergy who stand at the front of religious gatherings and shriek out lies and gibberish, while around them the weak-minded men, women, and children listen until it all roots itself deeply within their minds, becoming a predisposition and habit.[94]

Then, al-Razi returns to his charge that contradictions in the "holy" books prove their falsehood, for the contradictions of religions lead to contradictions in the revealed books that they revere. He begins with the Torah and the Qur'ān, and the prophetic hadith, and the anthropomorphic and human-like qualities of God they contain. He mentions how the Torah relates putting the fat on the fire so that the Lord can smell its scent, and how it depicts many other human qualities. This human-like and anthropomorphic description contradicts the impassive and impervious nature of God regarding things like smells. All this anthropomorphic imagery reveals God (in the Torah) to be a human construction that behaves and reacts like His creation.

[92] Quote from the previous reference, p. 205.
[93] Quote from the previous reference, pp. 208-211.
[94] Quote from the previous reference, pp. 211-212.

Likewise, al-Razi attacks Christianity and its claim of the existence of an uncreated ancient being by God's side: the Messiah, His son. This leads to associating a partner with God. Furthermore, how can we reconcile the saying by Jesus that he came to fulfill the Torah without abolishing its laws and changing its rulings? Strangely, during his criticisms of Christianity, al-Razi did not mention the passages in the Qur'ān about corruption of the Gospels.[95]

Anthropomorphism and contradictions are not only limited to Judaism and Christianity, but are also found in the sayings of the Prophet and the Qur'ān. This is demonstrated by what is related from the Prophet when he said, "I saw my Lord in the best of forms. He put His hand on my shoulders until I felt the cold of His fingertips on my chest,"[96] and, "…beside the throne by the shoulder of Israfeel, and he will be groaning the groan of a young camel being saddled (Israfeel is the angel who blows the trumpet twice on the Day of Judgment. Once to destroy everything, and a second time to bring humans back to life and summon them for judgment)."[97]

It is also obvious that many of the verses of the Qur'ān demonstrate anthropomorphism, and no-one can [98]deny that apart from the arrogant. An example is His saying (Mighty and Glorified is He): "The Compassionate One is firmly established on the Throne,"[99] and, "And eight angels will carry the Throne of your Lord above them on that Day,"[100]and,"Those who carry the Throne and those around him..." So how can this make sense? How can it be sound and correct in light of the fact that God is completely and utterly free from all the attributes of the profane, as made clear when He (Most High) said, "There is nothing whatever like unto Him..." [101]

Likewise, how can we reconcile verses about predestination with others about freewill? And perhaps al-Razi borrowed these questions from the books of Theological Discourse, as Abd al Rahman Badawi noted.[102]

As for the view that these verses require "Esoteric Interpretation" (Ta'wil) that suggests that the words have a hidden meaning, it was of no interest to al-Razi. He rejected it utterly, and paid no regard to Ta'wil, without taking it seriously at all. Ta'wil, in his opinion and the opinion of his like, was just interpolation and deceitful pretense—or, in my own expression, the "patching-up" with the intention of rescuing the text however one can by giving it an acceptable meaning. Al-Razi and his like approached religions as their texts plainly present them, and not as how the faithful claim the texts are: wrapped up in supposed hidden meanings that defy human understanding. [103]

Al Razi also criticised the Qur'ān because it contradicted Christianity and Judaism. "Indeed, the Qur'ān contradicts that which the Jews and Christians believe regarding the death of the Messiah, upon him be peace. The Jews and Christians say the Messiah was killed and crucified, but the Qur'ān says he was not killed and not crucified, and that God raised him up to Himself."[104] Thus does al-Razi use religions and divine books to undermine each other and arrive at the result that they are all false. The contradictions between them declare their falsehood in total, as long as they claim that they come from the same divine source.

After this attack on all religions, al-Razi comments: "By God, we are amazed that you say the Qur'ān is a miracle when it is full of contradictions. It is a narration of ancient myths, it has no benefit, and it is not proof of

[95] Quote from the previous reference, pp. 213-214.
[96] Quote from the previous reference, p 214. (الثَّنْدُوَة is the flesh between the nipples)
[97] Quote from the previous reference, p. 214.
[98] (40:7)
[99] (20:5)
[100] (69:17)
[101] (42.11)
[102] Quote from the previous reference, p. 218.
[103] Quote from the previous reference, pp. 214-215
[104] Quote from the previous reference, p. 215.

anything."[105] And this view is completely sound, for in the Qur'ān are conundrums and riddles, ambiguities and mysteries that the greatest scholars of Tafseer even today haven't been able to arrive at any conclusions on. They cannot agree on the meanings of these verses, in spite of all the ink they have spilled, the efforts they spent in meaningless summations and tedious disputations, and their nonsensical prattle with the sole obsession of rescuing a text that cannot be rescued except through sophistry, interpolation, prevarication, nonsense, and legend.[106]

Just as the Qur'ān challenged mankind and jinn to bring forth the likes of it, al-Razi challenged the Arab scholars of eloquence to bring the likes of that which is in Euclid's book, *Elements*, or *Almagest* by Ptolemy, or the masterful works of others. Al-Razi said, "Indeed, we demand from you the likes of that which you claim we are not able to do,"[107] and, in doing so, he threw the burden of proof back to the adversary. In other words, with this challenge, he showed that the proof itself must lie with the one making the claim, since it is not within the ability of man to bring the same that another man has brought, no matter how great his ability in perfecting the art of imitation.

Furthermore, these books and their like are more useful and of greater benefit than the Qur'ān and all the divine books are, because they contain knowledge that benefits people in their livelihoods and situations in the real world. Meanwhile, the Torah, Gospels, and Qur'ān no longer provide benefit. And, if one must discuss miraculousness and proof, then these useful books are more deserving of having such things ascribed to them. In this respect, al-Razi says, "By Allah, if He wanted a book to be a proof, then the books like *Elements* or *Almagest* that lead to understanding of the movement of the stars and planets, or the books of logic, or the books of medicine that are of benefit for the body, would be more deserving of being called a proof of divine revelation than those divine books that are of no benefit or harm."[108]

In any case, I am not the first to criticize the Qur'ān. I cannot claim that honour. Nor will I be the last, for indeed my work has precedence, but it differs regarding the method of treatment, its terms, and the relevant fields of knowledge. It is the pioneer's duty to acknowledge those who blazed the trail and opened the way before them. As for the right of the one who went before regarding the one who comes after, this right is that no-one will deny him other than the arrogant fool. For if the one who comes after had not found assistance and clarification from the one who was before, things would not go right for him, and he could not complete his intent, and his efforts would be futile and his aim confounded. Thus is the blade blunted, the mind made dull, and aspiration caused to fail: "And those who went before are the foremost. They are the ones who will be drawn near."[109]



[105] Quote from the previous reference, pp. 216 and 218 in two different versions.

[106] Whoever wishes to compose an approximate picture - even if it is not precise - of these prattlers and nonsense-talkers, then let him listen to the recordings of Sheikh Mutawali Sha'rawi, whose voice reverberates all over Arab radio. He explains the Qur'ān with a sharp tongue that erupts like a flood that he uses to delight the masses and ignorant amongst the scholars, while the idiots sitting around him roar out the words: "Allah! Allah!" or "Allah is great! Allah is great!", growing in zeal and impulsiveness. If they weren't in the mosque in a solemn religious gathering, they would fill the world with shouts and clapping, as they do at public rallies, and I have complete confidence that they don't understand a thing that's going on. This example is emulated by the ignorant amongst the scholars, religious teachers, preachers, and Imams of mosques. He (Sha'rawi) is regarded by his followers and admirers as being amongst the greatest (scholars) of Tafseer in this day and age - even a unique phenomenon amongst the phenomena of this age. He is even considered by his pupils to be amongst those who the prophet alluded to in the famous hadith: "Indeed God will send to this Ummah (Nation) at the beginning of every 100 years he who will renew/reestablish their religion for them!"

[107] Quote from the previous reference, p. 218.

[108] Quote from the previous reference, p. 219.

[109] (56:10-11)

*The Eloquence of the Qur'ān:*

We must now ask: is the Qur'ān really miraculous?

The belief in the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān does not withstand scrutiny in any way. There are numerous fallacies that surround this belief. We have seen some clear examples of that from Ibn al-Rawandi and Abu Bakr al-Razi, and in a little while we shall see many other examples that refute this belief, so long as we look impartially and objectively at the issues, and are not swayed by the majority or the prevailing views; scientific facts are not discovered by voting like in Parliaments, no matter how large the number of votes.

Miraculous eloquence has two aspects, in my opinion: language and meaning. As for miraculous language, its conditions are as follows: clarity of expression, fluency of wording, and freedom from superfluous complexity, weak composition, and disharmony. The speech must have a uniform level of quality, excellence, and perfection.

But miraculous language has no value if it is not accompanied by miraculous meaning. If not, then it is just an arrangement of words cobbled together: good-looking gibberish and meaningless padding. For that reason, eloquent speech must have consistency and symmetry in its ideas, and must be packed with meaning. It must be free from error and contradiction.

But the verses of the Qur'ān are uneven in quality, both in language and meaning, which was noticed by the classical scholars, as al-Suyuti confirmed. Although a large portion of verses are the height of excellence and beauty, another portion of verses fall far below that, while others still are weak and flawed.

In the same way, ambiguity and riddles envelope a significant number of the verses, to the extent that one is confused when trying to understand the intended meaning of this or that verse. Other verses appear to have no meaning at all, despite the fact that the exegetes (Mufassirun) and scholars of eloquence claim to have "discovered" a thousand and one meanings.

Indeed, the books of the scholars of eloquence are full of chapters that have no meaning, and have been contrived simply to provide an escape route and justification for the babble in some of the verses that confront the reader. They accomplish this by using the pretext of delving deeply for the secrets and sublime miraculousness of the Qur'ān.

In my opinion, the whole science of eloquence (Balagha) was contrived in order to defend the Qur'ān. In other words, it was conceived only for ideological reasons, and not to find the truth. Indeed, ideology is the governing factor in all the treaties of our scholars in this field, and it is at the expense of objectivity and scientific methodology. In addition to what we see in the Qur'ān of fragmentation and disarray, there are also blatant scientific mistakes. So does all of that correspond with the belief in the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān in any way? Or are there locks on hearts?[110] This is what we shall investigate now.

The majority of those who study the Qur'ānic text are not Westerners. They are believers who approach it with the belief that it is a holy text and that it cannot be criticized, since no falsehood comes to it from the front or the back. The presumption of its authenticity and infallibility is a prerequisite that places a barrier between us and the text. It deprives us of much of the wealth that may accrue from studying it.

[110] (Reference to Qur'ān 47:24 ).

In that way, we close all the doors that were open before us when we begin. And nothing remains for us to do but pour every effort that we possess into embellishing and polishing the text, imposing upon it that which is unlikely. We defend it, without caring whether it is right or wrong, and attempt to "discover" its hidden treasures, secrets, wisdoms, and meanings that boggle the mind and astound the intellect. Thus begins the journey of searching for the pearls.

The text may not be more than a collection of bombastic speech that does not mean anything, but the exegete, with his believing background and generous expectations, presupposes that the wisdom of the ages is therein because it is from the wise, all-knowing One: "The Trustworthy Spirit has descended with it to thine heart so that you may be of the warners."[111] I say if the text didn't mean anything, then indeed the exegetes still ended up seeing everything in it! It became the protected pearl and the hidden jewel. But this is a profoundly bankrupt method of dealing with the Qur'ānic text. It doesn't reap anything other than hot air, and does not result in anything other than waffle, double-talk, concoction, and false attributions to the text which had never occurred to its original author at all!

Truly, the Qur'ān is not amongst the secrets of the gods. It is not connected in any way to divine inspiration that would take it outside historical trends. It is purely a human achievement that complies with human principles. Like all human efforts, it is subject to strength and weakness, accuracy and error, agreement and contradiction, cohesion and disarray, consistency and inconsistency, originality and imitation, depth and superficiality, lucidity and brittleness.

As a direct result, the Qurʾan is a very ordinary book. It is necessary to remove it from its safe and secure refuge outside of human history, and return it to the world of people. After that, it will no longer be a storehouse for timeless wisdom, nor a divine book protected from error that no falsehood can approach from either front or behind. In that way, it and its time and its context will become part of the historical process and the unfolding of events.

If you read the Qur'ān, you will find ample claims about the Divine Being, acts of worship, exhortations, morals, legislation, injunctions, wisdoms, parables, stories, and legends. But you will hardly come across one page where ideas correlate or flow in a connected sequence or follow one another, unless the text is recounting the narrative of a story, or establishing a rule that requires a certain amount of elaboration. As soon as it finishes, it jumps to another subject that has no connection to it. It is interspersed with digressions that interrupt the narrative flow, leaving most of it without a point. So our waffling exegetes are forced to come up with a point for it, and if they find a point, it is only stumbled across after strenuous excavation that the wafflers attribute to profound wisdom.

There are complete pages in the Qur'ān that are full of confusion, as well as offensive words and weak expressions. It contains hollowness, affectation, artifice, fabrication, and ambiguity. It contains words that have meanings that conflict with one another, making it hard for one to decide which of the two conflicting aspects is the intended one. If these problems were simply confined to insignificant secondary issues, they would be less important, but they extend also to issues of belief and legislation.

We must not forget that, in addition to these errors and flaws, the Qur'ān contains contradictions that the eye cannot miss. How much effort the wafflers spent in trying to conceal them and give them strange meanings that they don't actually have in an attempt to make them the epitome of wisdom and sobriety!

In addition to these drawbacks that the Qur'ān is packed with (which we shall see detailed for ourselves later on), we see the Qur'ān mixing the speech of Allah with the speech of man within a single verse. While the first half of

[111] (26:193-194).

a verse starts off in the words of the Prophet or one of the pious, we find the second half ending in speech that cannot be a human speaking, and must be attributed to Allah. So either this portion has been inserted into the text, or the verse is incomplete, with half of it being lost so the scribe completed it (and most of them did not understand what they were transcribing) according to whatever words came to their minds. This would be how they repair the verse and fill its gap, despite all that is commonly disseminated about the authentication of the text and close attention to detail during its recording process.

Last but not least, the scholars find very great difficulty in accepting many verses from the "Wise Reminder" (the Qur'ān) due to its complete opposition to scientific facts in the present time. These verses are true as long as science, philosophy, and myths are all approximately one and the same thing. But today, the situation has changed, showing the naivety of the Qur'ān, which accepted the handed-down beliefs of ancient times, and then characterized those beliefs as the "treasure" of divine knowledge about the secrets of the universe, life, and destiny.

Despite all this, they want us to believe this about the Qur'ān: "Had it been from other than Allah, they would surely have found therein much discrepancy,"[112] but the patching-up of the wafflers is a guarantor by which every conflict is reconciled, and the reply to every objection is formulated. Their efforts bestow upon the Qur'ān a fluent, harmonious sense of unity, free from defects so that they can produce in front of them "an Arabic Qur'ān without any crookedness." [113]

We shall discuss all that in the widest scope possible, detailing, clarifying, and illustrating as the situation permits, so that we can open covered hearts and deaf ears and remove the veil over eyes that cannot see other than what they want to see. We will attempt to let loose the tongues so that they do not say anything about the truth except the truth, and express nothing but the truth.

Regardless of our verdict on the Qur'ān, it does contain bouquets of masterpieces and marvels that the fair-minded person, regardless of where his loyalties lie, or what his beliefs and convictions are, cannot fail to be moved by. He will feel inclined to bow in prostration to these masterful verses. But is the whole Qur'ān like that? No, and a thousand times: no!

Indeed, these verses and those that surround them are spectrums of light and rings of radiance that captivate the mind, heart, and emotions. But because of the ink they caused to be shed, pens they aroused, energies they let loose, and passions they stirred (I say because of spotlights they were put under), these verses hid another portion of verses from sight and cast them into the darkness. As a result, we only see that which catches the light, and we are blind to anything else. But if we remain in this state, whether we realise it or not, we will pass the same verdict on them both—and how foolish is that? We would put the dull verses in the same category as the glittering verses, and be oblivious to the huge gap between them, simply because they share the same name: Qur'ān. It is just like one who puts mud (الثرى) in the same category as the Pleiades stars cluster (الثريا) because they share the same root (ث ر ي).

So never think that the whole Qur'ān is of the same quality, cast in the mold of these outstanding verses that we presented in the previous pages. Certainly not! These are instances of pearls and gems being found amongst earth and pebbles. Like neighboring pieces of land with a sprinkling of grape vines here and there, while other places grow poisonous shrubs, gum trees, flowers, and date palms between sand dunes that are scattered with weeds, cane stalks, and harmful herbs. Are these the same, for example?

[112] (4:82)
[113] (39:28)

This is what the Qur'ān is like. It is, as we mentioned before, and as we shall see in more detail, not on one level of quality, brilliance, or splendour. It contains the poor as well as the rich, and all that lies inbetween that. It contains such a mixture of things that it is very difficult for the mind to see how to reconcile them.

But they are reconciled by force and coercion, and when concoction and waffling (of the mufassirun) gets involved in sewing together the tears, mending the cracks, and plugging the holes. Of the flaws, some are easy to repair, while others are so intractable that they require tremendous effort and resources. Other flaws are enigmatic mysteries, as though the mind was fettered by them. We shall remove from you your covering, O, Reader, so that your vision tomorrow will be sharp![114] Tomorrow is near for he who envisages it!

Look at this wonderful pearl, where the Qur'ān describes uncovering the secrets of the wrong-doers and exposing their affair in front of God, who makes their body parts speak on the Day of Judgment. Their own bodies bear witness against them about sins they have committed, which they thought had been brushed under the carpet, never to return. But the transgressions were recorded, and the body parts of the wrong-doers were able to articulate the truth:

*"On the Day that the enemies of Allah will be gathered together to the Fire, they will be marched in ranks. At length, when they reach (the Fire), their ears and their eyes and their skins testify against them as to what they used to do. They will say to their skins, 'Why are you bearing witness against us?' They will say, 'Allah, who makes everything speak, has made us speak. He created you for the first time, and to Him you are returned. You did not hide yourselves lest your ears and your eyes and your skins should bear witness against you, but you thought that Allah did not know much of what you did. But this thought of yours which you did entertain concerning your Lord has brought you to destruction, and (now) have you become of those utterly lost!'" (41:19-23)*

So if this is a "divine" masterpiece is of inimitable style, the likes of which cannot be achieved—and that last part is true—then is it possible to achieve the same as this "human" masterpiece by al-Jahiz? He states in his unique and delightful style in his book, *Squaring the Circle*, which overflows with style, eloquence, clarity, and illumination:

"Nay, why do their sayings concern you or their dispute weigh upon you? Those of understanding and those who speak from knowledge know that the abundance of your width detracts from the height of your stature, and what shows of your width absorbs what shows of your height. Although they differ about your height, they agree about your width, and since they spitefully concede to you a part and unjustly deny from you a part, you have gained what they conceded, while you stand by your claim regarding what they didn't concede. I swear that the eyes make mistakes, and the senses lie, and there is no conclusive verdict other than that given by intellect, and no true enlightenment except by way of the mind, since it is the rein for the limbs and the measure for the senses."[115]

One cannot mention the princes of speech without mentioning Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi, for he wrote comprehensive works, and from his tongue wisdoms gushed forth and deep meanings swarmed, yet his age deprived him the acclaim he deserved. I present to you here this text which is from the beginning of his book, *Enjoyment and Conviviality*, in which he describes the world in the most briefest of ways, and yet in a way so full of meaning and concise in its expression that it is as though he is describing his burning soul and faltering fortune:

[114] Ref. to Qur'ān 50:22
[115] "Squaring the Circle", edited by Charles Pellat, p. 5.

"Verily, this fleeting world is beloved, its luxury sought after, and a place amongst those of high council is solicited by any means and manner. For this world is sweet and verdant, delectable and lush. For he who is timid, his task will be arduous, while for he whose pressing is passionate, his coming and going will advance continually, while for he who is held captive by his expectations, his hardship will be long and his misfortune great, while for he whose greed and desires are inflamed, his impotence and deficiency will be exposed."[116]

Badi' al-Zaman (al-Hamadani) was intricate, just as al-Jahiz and al-Tawhidi were. He was a master at delighting the reader; words in his hands were obedient and compliant, redolent with fragrance and aroma, diffusing the scent of perfume. A great deal of his work that has reached us is the sort that one never finishes contemplating. They are no less excellent and eloquent than many of the verses of the "Reminder of the Wise." But many of the readers take the writings of al-Hamadani for granted. Let us read this beautiful, artistic piece where he describes his hunger during a year of famine in Baghdad, and how all of his hopes of obtaining food evaporated. He ended up with nothing but pain and grief. He uses the fictional character, 'Isa ibn Hisham, to relate it:

"'Isa ibn Hisham related to us and said, 'I was in Baghdad the year of famine, and so I approached a group, huddled like the stars of Pleiades, in order to ask something of them. Amongst them was a youth with a lisp in his tongue. He asked, 'What do you want?' I replied, 'There are two conditions in which a man prospers not: that of a beggar wearied by hunger, and that of an exile for whom return is impossible.' The boy then said, 'Which of the two gaps would you like me to fill first?' I answered, 'Hunger, for it has become extreme with me.' He said, 'What would you say to a loaf of bread on a clean table, picked herbs with sour vinegar, fine almonds with strong mustard, roast meat ranged on a skewer with a little salt, brought to you now by one who will not procrastinate with promises nor torture you with waiting, and who will, afterwards, follow it up with golden goblets of grape? Is that preferable to you, or a large company, full cups, variety of dessert, spread carpets, brilliant lights, and a skillful minstrel with the eye and neck of a gazelle? If you do not want this or that, then what do you say about some fresh meat, river fish, fried aubergines, the wine of Qutrubbul, freshly-harvested apples, and a soft bed on a high apartment opposite a flowing river, a bubbling fountain, and a garden with streams?' So I said, 'I am the slave of all three options you have given me.' The boy said, 'And so am I their servant, if only we had them!' I said, 'May God not bless you! You have revived desires which despair had killed, and then you snatched away the object of its relish!'"

Can you see this captivating beauty that the Qur'ān does not have a monopoly over? Turn your attention to Al-Jahiz, al-Tawhidi, Badi' al-Zaman, and many other greats of prose and poetry, such as Ibn Muqaffa', Abu Nuwas, Abu al-'Ala al-Ma'arri from the classical literati, and al-Mazini, al-Rafi'i, al-Aqqad, and Ta Ha Hussein from the moderns. They and their like have left us masterpieces that are as good as—if not better, at times, than—some of the verses of the Qur'ān. They left us a massive legacy, full of profound wisdoms and clear signs. But which one of them claimed that he is speaking under heavenly inspiration, or that he encompasses the secrets of the Divine?

The Qur'ān, as we have mentioned previously, is not on one level of quality. On the contrary, it is characterised by mediocrity, banality, weakness, disarray, fragmentation, confusion, ambiguity, and disclaimers alongside excellent verses that exhibit majesty, greatness, eloquence, cohesion, clarity, and complete accountability. The exegetes were at their wits' end in trying to explain this phenomenon, and so embarked on desperate efforts to

[116] "Enjoyment and Conviviality", edited by Ahmad Amin and Ahmad al-Zayn, Cairo, p. 13.

ignore them and push the problematic verses out of the spotlight so that we wouldn't come upon any of them during the discussions about the eloquence, rhetoric, beauty, marvels, and linguistic artistry of the others that adorn the Qur'ān.

They focused on the masterpieces in their books about the miraculousness of the Qur'ān, using them as examples in every chapter, section, and page—almost in every line—of their forced books, whether appropriately or inappropriately, until ears were sick of them and the mind was bored of them. Indeed, the degree that the spotlight concentrated on such verses was equaled by the degree that other verses were swept under the carpet. They imposed an invisible barrier around the weaker verses so that attention skips over them swiftly and lightly, leaving no time for pondering or contemplation. All of our readings of the Qur'ān are readings done as acts of worship, which only increases blindness each time more is committed to memory and as the tongue perfects its recitation. It is not a recitation that involves analysis, critique, understanding, or penetrating appraisal.

Yes, truly, the exegetes were pushed to explain these verses and create ways out for them. They ignored them whenever citing examples of eloquence, and resorted to their contortions every time they came across them in their writings. They forced the lackluster and problematic verses to encompass meanings they didn't encompass in order to preserve the Qur'ān's integrity.

They were the knights in shining armour: ever-present, never tiring of a challenge, never finding it too burdensome to come up with a reply, never letting any objective defeat them, never letting weariness weigh them down. They were standing by the door, answering every visitor. The students of Hermeneutics can find fertile ground and expansive pasture amongst them to support their analytical theories. You will know them by their signs. They are people of waffle, carriers of the incense. Some of them went to such absurd extremes that they became a laughing stock. They "discovered" amongst the confusing, bewildering, fluctuating, disordered, disturbed, incomprehensible, contradictory verses eloquent nuances and sublime connotations that are too subtle for the ordinary mind, that escape people's understanding, and challenges the intellect to the extent that no-one can fully perceive them other than those firm in knowledge—if they can be perceived at all! Give me a lunatic, and I will unearth pearls, jewels, and timeless gems of wisdom from his speech.

They were able to extract meaning from that which had no meaning. They never found it too hard to make the barren fertile, the mute articulate, the incoherent eloquent, and every old man in the prime of his youth. In their hands, everything is brilliant and fluid, excellent and magnificent. Hence, they claim, it comes from Heaven—even if it is a thorn, a bitter gourd, a deadly poison, or the like of such scourges. For Heaven cannot stand up on its own, except through the help of the one-eyed, the lame, the scrawny, the very decrepit, and the moronic dimwit. Repent to the dimwits, for indeed, they hold the keys to Heaven!

The judgment of the critic becomes increasingly defective as his faith strengthens regarding what he analyzes, until he only sees in the Qur'ān what he wants to see, and is blind to what he doesn't want to see. If you expose him to the extent of the Qur'ān's flaws, and its abundance of contradictions, he will fume and seethe with rage. He will insult and curse. He will block his ears to you as he has blocked his mind, and make the vilest accusations against you. Woe be to you, for you have come to create Fitna and turn him away from his religion, unless Allah makes him steadfast and blesses him with the blessing of strong faith!

Watch how he will block his ears, as though saying, "This is a manifest lie,"[117] as the people of Noah did when he said, speaking to his lord: "And every time I have called to them, that Thou mightest forgive them, they have

[117] (24:12)

(only) thrust their fingers into their ears, covered themselves up with their garments, grown obstinate, and given themselves up to arrogance."[118]

And this is what the polytheists of Mecca did, so the Qur'ān said to them: "Had We sent down unto thee, Muhammad, actual writing upon parchment so that they could feel it with their hands, those who disbelieve would have said, 'This is naught else than mere magic.'"[119]

Woe upon woe be to he who utters a single word of criticism against the truth of Islam! And what a catastrophe, what calamity if this criticism could harm even a single word of the Qur'ān! I wonder what the difference is between us and what we see today and between the people of Noah and the polytheists of Mecca?[120]

In summary, those who prattle on about the Qur'ān, heaping praises on it, raving about its eloquence and sublime beauty, filling the world with clamour about the miraculousness of the Qur'ān, claiming that it is the "Greatest Miracle,"[121] only cite the amazing and excellent verses that grace the Qur'ān, which form the basis of the magic of the Qur'ān. Their attention was poured on selected verses where there is no doubt about their eloquence and height of excellence and beauty.

But how many of them averted their attention from the weak and poor verses of the Qur'ān, which we shall give examples of shortly? And if they did turn their attention to them, they undertook the task of polishing, refining, and improving them in order to repair their defects and cover their flaws, so that they might leave their hands as protected gold nuggets or hidden pearls befitting the Lord of Might and Majesty, the Cleaver of Daybreak, until the Day of Judgement!

Eloquence is composing words in such a way that they correspond to intended meanings and embellish them with radiance. Eloquence is not simply to address people according to what they understand. Eloquence is to raise them up, to reach your objectives by clarifying them in ways that make people comprehend everything you want to enlighten them with.

Simply addressing people according to their mentality and understanding sacrifices meaning, depth, and comprehension. It gives precedence to a loose meaning over a precise and complete meaning. It distances what is said from its objectives. Therefore, it is the job of the literary master to aspire for something higher through his artistic expression, and not to resort to facile speech.

But we find that many verses of the Qur'ān are vague and based on ambiguous, imprecise concepts that do not deliver clarity regarding the underlying meaning. Their words lack precision and accuracy, and some are more like puzzles and quizzes.

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[118] (71:7)
[119] (6:7)
[120] Perhaps you have heard of the ministerial crisis in Kuwait and the demand for the dismissal of the Minsiter of Awqaf. Why? Because of the issue of a new edition of the Qur'ān containing some unintentional mistakes, which will send the minister to Hell on a day when no intercession will be had except one who has taken a promise from Allah. The printing mistakes came to light while he was minister –'Perish his hands!'– and appeared in a number of copies – May Allah humiliate him, he has brought a terrible thing, the heavens almost shatter, the earth split, the mountains collapse that he allowed the book of God to have flaws enter it and didn't prevent or avoid it – may God destroy him. He thought it was a trivial matter. He didn't see it - Woe to him! –as a grave, serious, obligation. So return him to Allah – him and his like – for that is more pure and fitting. If he desists not then he and his like will burn long in the Fire of Hell. And none shall come to the Merciful, except as a slave, and each one will come to him on the Day of Judgment alone!
[121] The name of a book by Muhammad Abu Zahra that is extolled by the masses – nay, by the select and the select of the select.

Precise language helps mold precise ideas, while ambiguous language confuses the mind and muddles one's thinking. For that reason, if we want speech to be eloquent, then we must fulfill the conditions of clarity, transparency, and effectiveness to reach the ear in the most beautiful language and most lucid speech. There must be soundness of meaning, and it must be error-free and without contradictions. It does not befit the writer of eloquent speech that his meanings should be disordered or contradictory, and it does not befit him to make mistakes in wording and meaning.

Among the things that contribute to clarity are candor, conciseness, soundness, and the ability to use moving words without being too abstract. It includes using short sentences without overstatement, and having preference for subtlety over coarseness. One must avoiding padding, obscureness, concoction, and using words with multiple meanings when the aim is clarity, and, in particular, words that have contradictory meanings.

Clear, eloquent speech must also have all of its parts linked with each other, and they must flow harmoniously in succession and in sequence with each other part. It should not jump from one sentence to another before fully dealing with and completing its components. This means each sentence should carry the same seed as the following sentence, and the following sentence concludes and completes the previous sentence. In this way, each part flows naturally from each other part, aesthetically unified, coalescing and integrated, as if they were a solid, cemented structure.

In short, eloquence (al-Balagha) is from al-Buloogh, which means to reach, and in relation to our subject here it is to reach those it was intended to reach. The crux of the matter is that eloquence means reaching the meaning and arriving at it. However, the meaning only becomes apparent if it has been demonstrated clearly. Likewise, it is not clear when it has not been demonstrated well. So whenever the meaning is deeply hidden or abstruse, then the speech has lost its purpose, and instead of clear instruction it becomes just babble with no use or benefit behind it.

Now, after this short tour around the subject of eloquence and its conditions, as well as the difference between eloquent speech and speech that is not eloquent, we are justified in asking: what is the position of the Qur'ān in all of this? What is its degree of eloquence? Is it on one level of eloquence, or is there a disparity between its verses? What is the degree of this disparity? This is what we shall discuss in the following section.

❖

*Where is the Eloquence of the Qur'an?:*

There are red lines that all Muslims who study the Qur'ān do not allow themselves to cross. None of them start from zero. On the contrary, they start off with absolute faith in His words, exalted is He! "Indeed, it is a book of exalted power. No falsehood can approach it from before or behind it: it is sent down by One full of wisdom, worthy of all praise."[122] And, as He said, "Do they not then ponder on the Qur'ān? Had it been from any other than Allah, they would surely have found therein much discrepancy."[123]

[122] (41:41-42)
[123] (4:82)

So falsehood cannot creep into the Qur'ān in any way, just as it is free from discrepancy. These two unassailable principles are not open to discussion. We can also add a third verse that emphasises the infallibility and inviolability of the Qur'ān: "Say: 'If the whole of mankind and jinn were to gather together to produce the like of this Qur'ān, they could not produce the like thereof, even if they backed up each other with help and support.'"[124]

If only I knew how a person can analyse the Qur'ān in an objective, dispassionate, independent way, when his hands are tied by these three verses! Remove these shackles, and you will immediately see that falsehood has indeed found its way into the Qur'ān, just like it has with any human accomplishment. That it resounds with contradictions, and all types of disparity. That it is possible to bring the likes of it, and even better. Remove the covering from your eyes, and free yourselves from restrictions. "But to whom are you singing your Psalms, O David?" No one wants to risk playing with fire; it simply does not enter the mind. And if it does, then the mind cannot entertain it, and if it does entertain it, then it cannot act upon it. Nay, even those who are beset by doubts about the soundness of the Qur'ān do not dare declare their true opinion. If they do, then they do it apologetically, and behind a veil—a thousand and one veils.

Thus, he who wants to know their views about this must use a level of ingenuity and intelligence that would enable him to bring out the suppressed in their writings, revealing the repressed by reading between the lines. As I said previously, they don't want to play with fire, instead choosing health and desiring peace. As for me, I love playing with fire, and there will be many more after me. It is fire that burns out the blemishes on gold, and destroys all spots and stains. If you aspire for something higher, you must live dangerously!

The first thing that strikes one in the Qur'ān is its disjointed nature. And yet, this disjointedness is not felt by the believer, firstly because of his long familiarity with the text, and secondly because his faith is a protective armour shielding him from heeding the flaws this text contains. As for the non-Muslim, especially if he is an Orientalist studying the Qur'ān for the first time, he will be stunned when he sees this strange cocktail in a single chapter (in fact, in a single page) of the word of the Lord of the Worlds. He may have been taken aback by many things, but not a cocktail like the Qur'ān!

Continuity is rare in the Qur'ān. In fact, it is non-existent, apart from Sura Yusuf and some of the short stories. Then, it reverts to its original style of interruption and disjunction. Even Sura Yusuf, which contains 111 verses, has the last nine verses disjointed from those before it. What is more, these nine verses are also a strange cocktail, with no connection between the elements that they are made of. However, the waffling exegetes had no problem in uniting this untidy hem into one piece, and creating all kinds of links and ties between its elements. And no wonder! For each one of them, like Allah, is "able to do all things!" That is, of course, when they turn their attention to any disjointedness or disarray in the Qur'ān, or at least when they admit to it!

Look at how these verses jump about, and tell me what links them together? (al-Isra' 17:70-88):

[124] (17:88)

*70. Indeed, we have honoured the children of Adam. We carry them on the land and the sea, and have made provision of good things for them, and have greatly preferred them above many of those whom we created.*

*71. On the day when We will call every people with their record/ leader; then, whoever is given his book in his right hand shall read their book, and they shall not be wronged in the least.*

*72. Whoever is blind here will be blind in the Hereafter, and most astray from the Path.*

*73. And they indeed strove hard to beguile you away from that which We have revealed to you, that you should invent other than it against Us; and then would they have taken you as a friend.*

*74. And if We had not made you firm, you might almost have inclined to them a little.*

*75. In that case, We would certainly have made you to taste double (punishment) in this life and double (punishment) after death, then you would not have found any helper against Us.*

*76. And surely they purposed to unsettle you from the land that they might expel you from it, and in that case they will not tarry behind you but a little.*

*77. (Such was Our) way in the case of those whom We sent before you, you will find no change in Our ways.*

*78. Establish regular prayers, at the sun's decline till the darkness of the night, and the morning recitation; surely the morning recitation is witnessed.*

*79. And some part of the night awake for it, an extra one for you, maybe your Lord will raise you to a praised position.*

*80. And say: My Lord! Make me to enter a goodly entering, and cause me to go forth a goodly going forth, and grant me from Thy Presence an authority to aid (me).*

*81. And say: Truth has come and Falsehood has vanished; surely falsehood is ever bound to perish.*

*82. And We reveal of the Qur'ān that which is a healing and a mercy for believers though it increases the evil-doers in nothing but ruin.*

*83. And when We bestow Our favours on man, he turns away and behaves proudly, and when evil afflicts him, he is despairing.*

*84. Everyone acts according to his own disposition, but your Lord best knows who is best guided in the path.*

*85. They ask you concerning the soul, say: The soul is one of the commands of my Lord, and you are not given anything of knowledge but a little.*

*86. And if We wanted, We could certainly take away that which We have revealed to you, then you would not find anyone to plead your case against Us.*

*87. Except for mercy from your Lord: Indeed His bounty is to you great.*

*88. Say: If men and jinn should combine together to bring the like of this Qur'ān, they could not bring the like of it, though some of them were aiders of others.*

Indeed, the whole of Sura al-Isra' is like this. The Qur'ān jumps from one place to another without traversing the wide roads or intersections between them, or covering the vast spaces that lead to them. Does this have the slightest connection with eloquence, O Princes of Eloquence? Answer me, O Champions of twisting, turning, and apologetics? I cannot see in those verses other than an insult to the mind that lulls it into unhealthy consequences and a terrible end! What is the difference between you and the journalists of the Third World, who sell themselves to the ruler and promote his decree in every place without conscience or integrity?

Disjointedness and imbalance in verses of the Qur'ān are the rule, while cohesion, continuity, and consistency are the exception.

What do you say, please, about the following verses? Give me your opinion on the matter, O Masters of Clear Speech and Eloquence, Guardians of Logic and Evidence. Allah (exalted is He) said during the story of Yunus (Jonah) when the whale swallowed him up:

*But had it not been that he was of those who glorify,*

*He would certainly have remained in its belly till the day when they are raised.*

*Then We cast him on to the bare shore in a state of sickness.*

*And We caused to grow up for him a gourd plant.*

*And We sent him to a hundred thousand, or more.*

*And they believed, so We gave them comfort for a while.*

*Now ask them their opinion: Is it that your Lord has daughters while they have sons?*

*Or did We create the angels females while they were witnesses?*

*(37:143-150)*

What do angels and their gender have to with the story of Yunus? How about adding a new section to the subdivisions of eloquence called the "Section of Dissonance," or the "Section of Incongruity," or such headings that signify the upside-down standards in the Qur'ān?

Perhaps the cocktail quality here won't show too much after a bit of patching-up, making it possible to link these disparate verses in the usual style of the people (the Mufassirun). But what sort of patching-up can link the elements of this cocktail that the eye cannot miss? A verse from the East and a verse from the West, and "from every valley, a stick," as they say:

*On the Day when the excuse of the wrongdoers will not benefit them and they will be cursed and have an evil abode.*

*And We indeed gave Moses the guidance, and We made the Children of Israel inherit the Book,*

*A guide and a reminder for men of understanding.*

*Then have patience; surely the promise of Allah is true, and ask forgiveness for your sin and sing the praise of your Lord in the evening and the morning.*

*Lo! those who wrangle concerning the revelations of Allah without a warrant having come unto them, there is naught else in their breasts save pride which they will never attain. So take thou refuge in Allah. Lo! He, and only He, is the Hearer, the Seer.*

*Indeed, the creation of the heavens and the earth is greater than the creation of the men, but most people do not know.*

*(40:52-57)*

Indeed, it appears that the disjointedness in the verses of the Qur'ān is part of the necessary requirements of the Wise Revelation! Turn the pages of the Qur'ān as you like, but you will not find one page free of disjointedness. The incongruities jump out at you without requiring any effort to search and hunt for them. So is there some profound wisdom in that which eludes our inadequate minds? That only the "firm in knowledge" can comprehend, and "how few are they?"

Continuity is almost never maintained, except in the stories and some of the legislative verses. Beyond that, you see the verses scattered to the four winds (Qur'ān, Sura 18, verses 46-51):

*Wealth and sons are adornment of the life of this world, but the things that endure—good deeds—are best in the sight of your Lord as reward, and better in respect of hope.*

*On the Day, We shall remove the mountains, and you will see the earth protruding, and We shall gather them, all together, and We shall not leave out any one of them.*

*And they shall be brought before your Lord, standing in ranks: Now certainly you have come to Us as We created you at first. Nay, you thought that We had not appointed to you a time of the fulfillment of the promise.*

*And the Book shall be placed, then you will see the guilty fearing from what is in it, and they will say: 'Ah! woe to us! What a book is this? It does not omit a small one nor a great one, but numbers them (all)!' And what they had done they shall find present (there), and your Lord does not deal unjustly with anyone.*

*And when We said to the angels, 'Make obeisance to Adam,' they made obeisance, but Iblis (did not). He was of the jinn, so he transgressed the commandment of his Lord. What! Would you then take him and his offspring for friends rather than Me, and they are your enemies? Evil is (this) change for the unjust.*

*I did not make them witnesses of the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor of the creation of their own souls; nor could I take those who lead (others) astray for aiders.*

*One Day, He will say: Call on those whom you considered to be My associates. So they shall call on them, but they shall not answer them, and We will cause a separation between them.*

*(18:46-51)*

Strangely, this disjointedness is not confined to imbalance in the sequence of the verses on a single page, making it into an amazing assemblage of disparate verses, but this imbalance intrudes upon a single verse separating its two ends, resulting in the last part being at odds with the first part:

*To Him is referred the knowledge of the hour, and there come not forth any of the fruits from their sheaths, nor does a female bear give birth, except with His knowledge. And on the Day when He calls out to them: Where are My partners? They will say, 'We confess to You, not one of us is a witness (for them).'*

*(41:47)*

What has the end of this verse got to do with the first part? Why is it that those who harp on about the eloquence and miraculous nature of the Qur'ān ignore this verse and its like, limiting themselves to the excellent verses, which no-one, regardless of his position on the Qur'ān, can avoid warming up to, willingly or not? As for the other verses (the shaky, unstable, and disordered verses that don't withstand scrutiny), they pass over them, oblivious or feigning to be oblivious. If they do deal with them, they repair them and weave threads like a spider's web to camouflage them and conceal their flaws. The masses fall for that, and even the select do, but it's inconceivable that a truly critical eye could fall for it, even though it makes one turn a blind eye in order to play safe.

For the believer, even if he is amongst the experts, or the experts of experts, will see things through his desire and not his senses. He will see it with his heart and not his mind. Only the unbiased, inquiring eyes—and how few are they—are able to penetrate deeply into matters and probe into the truth of things, until, in a few blinks of an eye, the full radiance of the sun is revealed. Such a critic can see the true essence of things: a spider's web is indeed a spider's web. A building cannot stand upright with it, nor can it keep the suppressed in check. There is no substance to it, nor can it withstand scrutiny. However, our silence dignifies it. So, who is with me in removing the silence from it? Indeed, the weakest of houses is the house of the spider![125]

[125] (Qur'ānic ref)

Now, I present to you these verses. Please help me to understand them, and may Allah help you:

*And give to the orphans their property, and do not substitute something worthless for something good, and do not devour their property into your own property; that is, indeed, a great sin.*

*(4:2)*

*And if you fear you cannot deal fairly with the orphans, then marry such women as seems good to you—two and three and four—but if you fear that you will not do justice, then only one, or what your right hands possesses; this is more proper, that you may not deviate from the Right Course.*

*(4:3)*

This last verse is amongst the strangest of things, for it combines within it two matters that are not possible to combine, unless it is possible to combine oil and water. Despite all that I have read in the books of Tafsir and all that they contain of unreasonable, atrocious, empty waffle and forced meanings, I'm still unable to understand the connection between justice to orphans and marriage.

It is most likely that there is a missing third verse between the opening clause, "If you fear..." and the concluding clause, "Then marry…" omitted either intentionally or unintentionally. Unless, of course, the waffling exegetes can find some "profound wisdom" or "eloquent significance," as they have got us accustomed to expecting! If not, then everything in their bag of tricks to rescue the verse is of no use. For the verse, as it stands and the way it is, makes no sense! Indeed, the rigidity of the exegetes was unable to shed light upon this verse, and could only leave it as it was revealed, fearing alteration or attributing something to the word of God that wasn't truthful.

There is a significant stylistic error that I used to consider the Qur'ān above falling into. The Qur'ān describes the comforts of Paradise and things the believer can look forward to that no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor mind encompassed, and this proceeds from the premise of creating the world into a new creation. It then turns back to the premise of creating a new creation instead of starting with the premise and ending with its consequence, or, rather, one of its consequences! This is a back-to-front way of doing things that the Qur'ān should not slip into (21:101-104):

*Those for whom the good from Us has gone before will be removed far from it (Hell).*

*They will not hear its faintest sound, and they shall abide forever in that which their souls long for.*

*The Supreme Horror will not grieve them, and the angels will meet them (saying): 'This is your Day which you were promised.'*

*The Day that We roll up the heavens like a scroll rolled up for books, as We originated the first creation, (so) We shall produce a new one, a promise (binding on Us); surely We will bring it about.*

*(21:101-104)*

Shouldn't it have started with the rolling up of the heavens, and then mentioned what follows on from that of the rewards and punishments people will get? O, Masters of Eloquence, which sub-division of eloquence does this upside-down sequencing fall under? Is breaking up continuity with a conflicting verse that has no link with what went before it and then resuming the narrative after that an aberration, anomaly, and disharmony? Or is it amongst the sublime signs of miraculousness? Please, only speak the truth about miraculousness. Miraculousness is precision in narrative, continuity, and harmony, with each part adhering to and supporting the other so as to arrive exactly at what the author intends to. He conveys precisely what he desires, without interruption, aberration, or anomaly in the eloquent, miraculous speech.

After relating the story of the People of the Cave and how God raised them from their sleep, the Qur'ān turned to the question of their number and the people's dispute about it. But instead of telling us this number—this mystery, this unusual thing, this hidden secret—He withheld it from us, only to sadden and humiliate:

*(Some) will say: three, the fourth being their dog. (Some) say: five, the sixth being their dog, making conjectures at what is unknown. And (some) say: seven, and the eighth their dog. Say: my Lord best knows their number, none knows them but a few; therefore enter not into controversies concerning them, except on a matter that is clear, nor consult any of them about them (the Sleepers).*

*(18:22)*

If only He had completed the final part of the story and bestowed upon us the knowledge of how long they stayed in the cave, them and their beloved dog! But He preferred (glorified is He), for the sake of a wisdom no-one knows except Him, to dash our hopes to know the truth of this curious affair. I cannot see (and I am only a poor servant) any reason for this secrecy, even if our masters, the exegetes (mufassirun), can see a thousand-and-one reasons.

Then, after the previous verse, it says:

*And do not say about anything that I will do tomorrow, unless (saying), 'If Allah wills it,' and mention your Lord if you forget, and say, 'Perhaps my Lord will guide me to a nearer course to the right than this.'*

*(18:23-24)*

And now you have the pleasing item and the happy surprise after this long wait:

*And they remained in their cave three-hundred years, and (some) add (another) nine.*

*(18:25)*

If only He (May He be Glorified) would settle on this number! But He insists on it remaining wrapped up in the unseen things of the heavens and Earth:

*Say: God knows best how long they remained; to Him are (known) the unseen things of the heavens and the earth; how clear His sight and how clear His hearing! They have no protector other than Him; nor does He share His command with any person whatsoever.*

*(18:26)*

Who knows? Maybe He (may He be glorified) doesn't know the number of the sleepers and their auspicious dog, nor how long they remained in the cave. Instead, we have extravagant polemical conjectures and broad idiosyncratic flip-flopping, and loose, unrestrained linguistic flapping-about. Would that He had never mentioned this story at all, for it is a story that is cut off! I don't know what the masters of the art of storytelling think about it.

Among the strangest verses of the Qur'ān, and the most disordered and confused and the furthest from fluency, soundness, and harmony, are those that are this way because of the numerous parenthetical sentences in them, of which there is no end. Their edges become entangled with other verses so that one finds it hard to come across the conclusion of the original verse—if there is a conclusion—and distinguish it from the rest of the verses. This was a matter that weighed heavily on the poor exegetes, and forced them to approximate a conclusion for them so as to at least preserve the integrity of the Qur'ān! Indeed, amongst the strangest of these and the furthest from unity and cohesion are these verses: a sprawling, long cocktail that is talking about the Jews. (4:155-161)

*Then because of their breaking of their covenant, and their disbelief in the revelations of Allah, and their slaying of the prophets wrongfully, and their saying: our hearts are hardened, nay, Allah set a seal upon them for their disbelief, so they believe not save a few.*

*Because of their disbelief and of their saying against Mary a tremendous lie.*

*And their saying, 'We slew the messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, Allah's messenger.' They slew him not nor crucified him, but it was made to appear so to them, and indeed those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof; they have no knowledge thereof save a conjecture; they slew him not, for certain.*

*Nay, Allah took him up unto Himself; Allah was Ever Mighty, Wise.*

*And There is not one of the People of the Scripture but will believe in him before his death, and on the Day of Resurrection he will be a witness against them.*

*Because of wrongdoing of the Jews, We forbade them good things which were lawful to them, and because of their hindering many from Allah's way.*

*Their taking usury when they were forbidden it, and of their devouring people's wealth by false pretenses, We have prepared for those of them who disbelieve a painful punishment.*

*(4:155-161)*

Is this mish-mash part of the marvelous eloquence? Why doesn't anyone cite these verses when talking about the beauty of the Qur'ān, the precision of the Qur'ān, and the sublime melody of the Qur'ān? No, they limit themselves to the excellent verses. Then again, perhaps mixing things into a hodgepodge is part of the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān?

Finally, I present to you these two verses, without comment, for you to decide for yourself what comment they deserve: (17:60-61)

*And when We said to you: Surely your Lord encompasses men; and We did not make the vision which We showed you but as a trial for men and the cursed tree in the Qur'ān as well; and We put terror into them, but it only adds to their great inordinacy. And when We said unto the angels: 'Prostrate before Adam,' and they prostrated, except Iblis. He said, 'Shall I prostrate before that which you created of clay?'*

*(17:60-61)*

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*Disorder in the Distribution of Topics:*

The Qur'ān's glaring fragmentation resulted in considerable anarchy in the distribution of verses, and an inability to pursue and explore topics properly. The Qur'ān is not an academic book divided into chapters that deal with a specific issue in each one, just as the names of the Suras often do not signify anything important. The chapter of the Cow (Al-Baqara), for example, was only named this because it contains a short story about it, and it could have been named any other name. Likewise is the chapter of the Bee (Al-Nahl), and the Ant (Al-Naml), and so on.

Since the subjects in the Qur'ān are not divided into sections or chapters, you will find one topic sprinkled over multiple suras and a variety of verses, inserted here and there. I don't know the reason for that other than it must be amongst the requirements of eloquence and miraculousness. Who knows? Maybe behind this bizarre design is a mighty wisdom that minds cannot comprehend.

Here's the chapter of Women (Sura al-Nisa'), for example. It is Chapter 4, with 176 verses. It only deals with the subject of women in 32 verses. What remains of the Sura is a fragmented, varied assortment that meanders around individual religious issues such as prayer, zakat, kindness to parents, family ties, inheritance, forgiveness, accepting the decree of God, Jews, Christians, worshipping Jesus as God, and the rejection of polytheism. It also contains long narratives about fighting and jihad, and making migration in the way of God, which, in my view, should be attached to Sura al-Tawba, or Sura al-Ahzab, since there is no place for it in this sura—in fact, it is totally out of place in it.

It is odd that, after talking about women in the first twenty five verses, the Qur'ān jumps suddenly to talking about repentance and family ties from verses 26 to 33 before returning to speaking about women from verses 34 to 35.Then, it talks about a variety of other topics which are not connected to each other by any single theme, and then it stops at verse 126 to resume talking about women from verse 127 until 130. Next, it moves on to other topics and matters until the penultimate verse of the sura (verse 175). Then, it remembers that in the bow is one last arrow, so it saves it to talk about another subject that has nothing to do with women, but is shared between women and men: inheritance. The subject of inheritance clearly hadn't been completed in the previous verses (I am referring to al-Kalala) which it left off talking about until the very last verse of the sura, whose number is 176.

There are many other Suras in the Qur'ān that talk about women, such as Sura al-Ahzab, for example. It is Chapter 33, containing 73 verses. This Sura begins with a general preamble from verses 1 to 3, and then, from 4 to 6, it speaks about marriage and adoption. Then comes an interjected seventh verse that has no connection to what precedes it or what comes after. From verse 8 to 27, it talks about fighting and jihad. Next, it returns to talking about about women and marriage and adoption from verse 28 until 38. Afterward, it jumps to an interjected verse, which is verse 39.

From verse 40 until 48 is some beautiful speech about Muhammad, which, in my opinion, is amongst the occasional outstanding pieces that we find in the Qur'ān. In my opinion, these verses should be in Sura Muhammad, which is Chapter 47 in the Qur'ān…but God's wisdom demands that it should be here. From verses 49 to 59, it returns to talking about women, marriage, and adoption, as well as the wives of the Prophet with some interjections that the Qur'ān has gotten us accustomed to expecting. From Verse 60 until the end of the Sura, there is an assorted cocktail that hardly one page of the Qur'ān is free from.

Regarding the presence of the passage about Muhammad in this Sura (the verses which I said are amongst the most outstanding verses), indeed, its presence in this place detracts from its excellence, and takes away much of its beauty. Perhaps this is part of eloquence and signs of miraculousness? This can be applied to a large number of the Qur'ān's excellent verses, for many excellent verses have had their radiance hidden through poor choice of

positioning, lost under a huge pile of incongruous material that has no theme, substance, shape, or purpose. They are like a beautiful woman from a bad origin.[126]

Likewise, we see that the arrangement of the verses in the Qur'ān is very primitive, and we can find the explanation for this strange phenomena in the Abrogator and the Abrogated in the Qur'ān. God Almighty had said: "None of Our revelations do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, but We substitute something better or similar. Do you not know that Allah has power over all things?" (2:106)

For, indeed, a great deal of the Qur'ān has gone[127]. In fact, al-Suyuti praised Abrogation, saying that it is amongst the wisdoms that God favoured this Ummah with in order to make things easier.

Al-Suyuti relates many examples of what Uthman left out when he was collecting the Qur'ān on the basis that it was abrogated. Regarding this is the Hadith of Aisha, who said, "When Sura al-Ahzab was recited at the time of the Prophet, it had two-hundred verses."[128] Now, it has 73 verses. Similarly, al-Suyuti also mentioned that a whole sura was revealed and then removed[129].

This abrogation has distorted the Qur'ān and left it fractured, making it impossible to stitch together or coalesce its parts. These shreds are what constitutes the Qur'ān that reached us today. The disarray and glaring fragmentation we see in the Qur'ān could be the inevitable result of multiple suras in one sura. Or, it could be the remainder of deleted suras, of which only these fragments remain. Or, perhaps, they are drafts of verses that should have been revised and reviewed, but the sudden death of the Prophet, afflicted by the poison that the Jewish woman slipped into his food, did not allow him to complete the required revisions.

My view is that this disarray in the Qur'ān must be faced by firm, brave action so that we can return order to the disordered verses that have no link between them, and to the ones scattered here and there in hundreds of pages that the Mushaf contains between its covers. There must be an initiative to sort the muddle of these wildly disparate verses, to reunify them into a new, rational layout of order, composition, and arrangement of chapters that responds to the demands of the age. It must create unity between this huge quantity of disparate muddle and sweep away the staleness between its parts which have neither beginning nor end, neither head nor foot.

Throughout fourteen centuries, not one voice was raised to rectify this defect, just as in India not one voice was raised in protest over bathing in the holy river at religious festivals or seeking healing, even though it is a filthy river that increases the sickness of the sick. Likewise, no voice was raised in complaint against the cows that are let free to come and go as they please, grazing in the streets and public places, wandering between houses and shops without anyone being allowed to touch them. This occurs in a country where the starving sees his livestock assets destroyed in front of him, but silently does nothing.

Is this disorder in the Qur'ān from the All-Wise, All-Knowing One? Oh, people, use your minds and don't get left behind in the race. Is this amongst the signs of miraculousness? Is there not a rational one amongst you?

How much we are in need of a new Qur'ān that will do away with the old Qur'ān, and pull it up by the roots! Yes, indeed, we are in need of a new Qur'ān that will keep pace with the age and progression and evolution of events,

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[126] Reference to the hadith: "Beware of the green manure." The Companions asked: "What is the green manure?" He said: "A beautiful woman of bad origin (i.e. upbringing)." (Al-Daraqutni)

[127] (47) Jalal al-Din Al-Suyuti, The Perfect Guide to the Sciences of the Qur'ān, 2/25.

[128] (47) Jalal al-Din Al-Suyuti, The Perfect Guide to the Sciences of the Qur'ān, 2/25.

[129] (47) Jalal al-Din Al-Suyuti, The Perfect Guide to the Sciences of the Qur'ān, 2/25.

after Nietzsche declared the death of the old God and the defeat of His dominion and sovereignty. Forget the old Qur'ān, for there is no use in trying to patch up the decrepit if we can bring about something new.

Indeed, the Qur'ān was once a breakthrough, but now it has become burnt-out. It was the revolution of revolutions in a time that lacked revolutions. The Qur'ān, in its time, was amongst the most important factors for progress. But today, it has become an obstacle to all progress. This astonishing, baffling, and peculiar hopping about that our Arab ancestors transmitted to us from the margin of history to the dawn of history, had once inspired them to become innovators of the age, masters of their time. If it wasn't for the Qur'ān, they would have remained groping about aimlessly in their stagnant plight 'till the Day of Resurrection. It is as though the Qur'ān propelled them to engage with the events of the time, and threw them into the vast ocean of world affairs, and helped them conquer new horizons.

Yes, the Qur'ān was once a revolution. But, like all revolutions, it is a revolution for a limited time only. Then it must make its way to the museum. Like all revolutions, it eventually becomes reactionary. The revolution has been replaced by a non-revolution. And yet, we stubbornly insist on deluding ourselves that the revolution is still taking place. We are now sitting with our Qur'ān in the darkness of the museum, brooding over memories of our life when we existed outside the museum. Every time we raise our heads and try to get out of the museum, we are thrown back inside. It has been centuries since we lived in the time of revolution. We will never be able to see the truth unless we believe in truth and embrace it, for that alone will enable us to see the true nature of things without the pretense and self-deception.

The problems of the present generations of this nation cannot be solved in the same way they were for the first generations. Now is a different time, and the people are a different people, and the needs and expectations today are not the needs and expectations of the past. But the regressive ones amongst us insist on living with ghosts and flirting with the spirits of the past, and they refuse to believe that the ghosts are ghosts. That is the power of ghosts to those who believe in them!

Clarity of speech comes from clarity of vision, and clear vision is formulated by lucid thought and expression. But ambiguous expression only leads to ambiguous meaning. Many verses in the Qur'ān are constructed of ambiguous material, and so they do not appeal to the mind or become clear to the intellect. They are enigmas that strut about in front of you, without you knowing what they are about. They are words transformed into unintelligible, cryptic messages that baffle the mind. They opened the door wide to folktales, mythical fantasies, Isra'iliyat (tales originating from Judeo-Christian traditions), the study of secret knowledge, and all manner of weird meanings and strange accounts. Every commentator who dived in to discover their meaning came out with a precious pearl of wisdom!

The first of these puzzles are the Abbreviated Letters (al-Muqatta'at) at the beginning of some of the Suras:

Alif, Lam, Mim. (The Cow, The Family of 'Imran, the Spider, the Romans, Luqman, the Prostration)

Alif, Lam, Mim, Sad. (the Heights)

Alif, Lam, Ra'. (Jonah, Hud, Joseph, Abraham, The Rocky Tract)

Alif, Lam, Mim, Ra'.( Thunder)

Kaf, Ha', Ya', 'Ain, Sad. (Mary)

Ta', Ha'. (Ta Ha)

Ta', Sin, Mim. (The Poets, The Stories)

Ta', Sin. (The Ant.)

Ya', Sin (Yasin)

Sad (Sad)

Ha', Mim, 'Ain, Sin, Qaf. (The Consultation)

Qaf (Qaf)

Ha', Mim. (Forgiver, Expounded, the Ornaments, the Smoke, the Crouching, The Winding Sand-Tracts)

Nun. (the Pen)

What are these puzzles? Is this part of the Qur'ān "…whose verses have been expounded in a clear Arabic tongue?" Where is the clarity, O people? Is it in the conundrums? Has eloquence in the Qur'ān been transformed into a collection of letters that do not mean anything to us? Or perhaps He got confused (May He be Glorified), and thought that we are like Him and encompass all things with knowledge, as if we are Him and He is us? Is it miraculousness to baffle people? One of the most important conditions of eloquence is that people must understand what you are saying. Perhaps the one who revealed this has an opposite opinion to that? Enlighten me, please, if you can.

The matter doesn't stop there, for if the ambiguity here surrounds letters, we shall see shortly that it surrounds the "clear" verses, also. Indeed, I have tried to read certain verses, and just pure reading is quite pleasurable, but it is also a burden. The words come in a constant stream that don't relate to each other, but instead hop over one another and clash with each other. They are converging and diverging; corresponding, contrasting, and contradicting; halting, and then resuming.

There are narratives that end abruptly, and then, look: here they are, suddenly returning! Wonders of expression and manipulation of words that draws before your eyes what looks like an elaborate embroidery, covered in ambiguity. The words are able to create from letters something that more closely resembles an intangible vision, and visions have no clear boundaries. The rhetorical art has the power to turn the narrative into an ambiguous melody that has no precise significance, but is able to take you out of reality, with its burdens and horrors, and transport you to the Garden of Eden.

This is the power of words, for words can be insidious, devious, and multi-faceted. They thrill with their interplay, interaction, and clashing. They are an overflowing flood: either you drown in them, or you swim like a proficient swimmer, saving yourself by detaching yourself from the dominating and drowning power of words.

In my opinion, this is what explains the strange effect of the Qur'ān on the minds and souls of the general populace. Nay, even the minds of the elite, and the elite of the elite, and upon the scholars, literati, poets, and philosophers, and those like them who cannot swim very well. Instead, they come out on a daily basis with scientific discoveries that the Qur'ān was the first to discover fourteen centuries ago, on the tongue of an illiterate man who

cannot read or write, and grew up in a remote desert, far from the centres of learning and civilisation. This is what seduces the general populace and increases their faith in the miraculousness of the Qur'ān.

It is strange that the Qur'ān often launches into unnecessary details that have no meaning, while it lacks details in other places where they should be clarified without hesitation. Take this verse as an example:

*And mention in the Book Moses: he was one purified, and he was a messenger, a prophet.*

*And We called him from the right side of the Mount, and drew him near to Us, in communion.*

*(19:51-52)*

I can't understand any meaning for the word "right" in connection to an expansive mountain terrain that has no distinguishing marks, and everything in it could be described as on the right or the left of something else. Direction is subjective; it has no objective meaning, but is relative. Its meaning is defined in relation to something else.

Likewise, when the Qur'ān presents the story of the People of the Cave and their faithful dog, we see it listing details to a ridiculous extent, despite not settling on a specific number for them. So it says, just as when we human beings would say when unable to specify something precisely, "Some say seven, and some say eight," even though God is the Knower of the unseen!

In this respect, it hasn't escaped me to mention these verses: the puzzles related from Moses after he descended from the Mount and found his people worshiping the calf. He lost his temper, and grabbed his poor brother, Harun, by the neck.

*So Moses returned to his people in a state of anger and sorrow. He said, 'O, my people! Did not your Lord promise you a goodly promise? Did then the time seem long to you, or did you wish that displeasure from your Lord should be due to you, so that you broke your promise to me?'*

*They said, 'We did not break (our) promise to you of our own accord, but we were made to bear the burdens of the ornaments of the people, then we threw them, and thus did the Samiri suggest.'*

*So he brought forth for them a calf, a (mere) body, which had a mooing sound, so they said, 'This is your god and the god of Musa, but he forgot.'*

*Could they not see that it did not return to them a reply, and (that) it did not control any harm or benefit for them?*

*And certainly Harun had said to them before, 'O, my people! You are only being tested by it. Surely, your Lord is the Merciful One. Therefore, follow me and obey my order.'*

*They said, 'We will by no means cease to keep to its worship until Musa returns to us.'*

*He (Musa) said, 'O, Harun! What prevented you, when you saw them going astray,*

*So that you did not follow me? Did you then disobey my order?'*

*He said, 'O, son of my mother! Seize me not by my beard nor by my head; surely I was afraid, lest you should say: You have caused a division among the children of Israel and not waited for my word.'*

*He said, 'And what do you have to say, O Samiri?'*

*He said, 'I saw something they did not see, so I took a handful from the footsteps of the messenger, and so I threw it; thus did my soul commend to me.'*

*(20:86-96)*

These verses are a collection of puzzles. As in the case of the abbreviated letters, the exegetes were forced to bring out all their reserves of myths and legends and waffle according to their desires in order to decipher these mysterious inscriptions, and sweep away the ambiguity which surrounds them. Yet, it is obvious that, in the field of eloquence, brevity in the wrong place impairs the meaning, just as overelaboration spoils the meaning.

Tell me, if you can, the meaning of: "But we were made to bear the burdens of the ornaments of the people, then we threw them."[130] Where did they throw them? The exegetes say that they threw them in the fire. How do they know that if it wasn't for the stories from the Torah, which the Qur'ān says is corrupt? What would be the harm in mentioning the word "fire" when revealing the verse? Why make us resort to a "corrupt" book to understand one that is not corrupt?

But the big puzzle is the one that stands out in the last verse, where the disorder reaches its height: "I saw something they did not see, so I took a handful from the footsteps of the messenger, and so I threw it."

[130] (20:87)

What is this handful? And which prophet is it talking about? What fertile ground is this to resurrect the isra'illyat and pile myths in layers upon layers? As a result, it spoils the myth of an Arabic Qur'ān "that has no crookedness in it, that they may fear God."[131]

If you would like more of these puzzles in the verses of the Qur'ān, then here is this verse:

*And certainly We tried Sulayman, and placed on his throne a body. Then did he repent.*

*(38:34)*

Do you know what this body is that God placed on Sulayman's throne? He was a jinn who appears to be an Arab, because his name is Sakhr, and he sat on the throne of Sulayman, who had married a woman he desired, but who worshipped idols. His kingdom was contained in his famous ring. One time, he removed it when he wanted to go to the toilet, and gave it to his wife to hold. Then that jinn came in the form of Sulayman and took it from her and sat on this throne. Then Sulayman came out of the toilet, but in an appearance that was different from his real form, which the jinn had stolen from him. He saw the jinn on his throne and said to the people, "I am Sulayman, so reject him (the jinn)!" Then, he repented to God, and his kingdom was returned after a few days!

There's nothing like a good old fable to bestow meaning on these verses. Oh, what joy are these incomparable verses for feeding the minds of Muslims with myths! They cripple their intellect, diverting them from the world that is turning around them so that they swim along in the world of the invisible, far away from the world of the visible!

It is as though this huge seam of ambiguity that surrounds the Qur'ān, and which puts the concept of its miraculousness in serious doubt, is not enough, and so it adds another handicap. In addition to what we have discussed, which burdens the Qur'ān with ambiguity and adds more ambiguity on top of it, is its frequent usage of conflicting words. The text uses words that possess two opposing meanings at the same time, even in doctrinal matters and legislative verses, and even though this should be amongst those things are totally off-limits in a book that is supposed to be inimitable.

Take the verb "Ghabara" (غَبَرَ), for example. It has two conflicting meanings: "to go" and "to stay." Yet, this word appears seven times in seven verses that talk about the wife of Lot:

*And when Our messengers came to Ibrahim with the good news, they said: 'Surely, we are going to destroy the people of this town, for its people are unjust.' He said: 'Surely in it is Lot.' They said: 'We know well who is in it; we shall certainly deliver him and his followers, except his wife; she shall be of the Ghaabireen.'*

*(29:31-32)*

[131] (39:28)

Thus, the angels of punishment did indeed take Lot and his family out from the village and made his wife to remain, for she was of the "Ghaabireen," meaning in this instance 'those who remained' in the village, to earn her portion of the punishment.

Perhaps using this word that reflects two conflicting meanings is unimportant here, because it doesn't concern a matter of faith or legislation. But the situation is quite different regarding another word that also has two completely contradictory meanings which pertains to a fundamental and critical matter of faith. I am referring to "Thanna" (ظَنّ ). This verb can give a meaning of doubt, and also give a meaning of certainty. Despite this, the Qur'ān has no problem with using it:

*And seek help through patience and prayer, and indeed it is a hard task, except upon the humble, who know* (يظنون) *they will certainly meet their Lord, and to Him they shall return.*

*(2:45-46)*

Is it right to use the word Thanna in this case? Perhaps the meaning here is that it is not necessary for one to have complete conviction in the Day of Judgment? Perhaps Allah is content for the servant, in this case, to have doubt and weak faith? So what is to stop the meaning of this verse being like that, for the text doesn't exclude that possibility?

There is another word in the Qur'ān that has two contradictory meanings, and it is related to a fundamental legal ruling in religion. I'm referring to the word "Qur" (قرء), which is amongst those conflicting words. Its meaning is both the menstruating of a woman, as well as becoming free from menstruating at the same time! So since that is the case, then how are we to interpret His saying (Most High is He):

*Divorced women shall wait, keeping themselves apart, for three menstruations (or three periods of being free from menstruation).*

*(2:228)*

So which of the conflicting meanings is the intended one here? The matter has two possibilities! Also in this respect is the word "Ihsaan" (إحصان) and its derivatives. It means chastity, as in not being married:

*And Maryam, the daughter of 'Imran, who kept chase her privates.*

*(66:12)*

However, it also means marriage:

*And when they are taken in marriage...*

*(4:25)*

Moreover, it means emancipation and freedom:

*…then if they are guilty of indecency, their punishment is half that for free women...*

*(4:25)*

Indeed, this word has been used here (in 4:25) in two different meanings in a single verse! Who knows? Maybe this is the height of miraculousness!

Tell me, by your Lord: who is responsible for this ambiguity? What can the exegetes do in the face of these verses, these puzzles? I wonder: was it in their ability to do anything other than what they did? And who forced them to resort to that? Had the Qur'ān been clear, do you think ambiguity would have been praised in this way by the books of tafseer? Or are baffling puzzles amongst the aspects of eloquence and signs of miraculousness?

If the Qur'ān was truly clear, and if the people related what they understand and not what they don't understand, and if it were more sober and rational, it would have bestowed upon the exegetes a sturdy and sound mentality. It would have afforded them a solid line of reason with which to deal with the Qur'ān, and to help interpret the decrees of God, so that Muslims would not have drowned in mythological fantasies that never leave them for a day. Unfortunately, with the passage of time, we have only sunk ever deeper into this myth of miraculoussness and have reached a state of such ignorance and backwardness that escaping it is an almost impossible. It seems impossible in the near future, at least!

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*Obscurities of the Qur'ān:*[132]

[132] I have translated "Gharib al-Qur'ān" as "Obscurities of the Qur'ān." However it could also be translated as: "Strange", "Rare", "Foreign", etc... "Gharib al-Qur'ān" is an established branch of Qur'ānic Sciences (Uloom al-Qur'ān),which the classical Islamic scholars wrote much about. This branch of study came about due to the number of odd, and often incomprehensible, words that Muslims found when reading the Qur'ān. These words were not part of ordinary Arabic language. Some were rare or unusual Arabic words or spellings. Some were from closely linked languages like Hebrew, and some from more distant foreign languages.

In the science of the miraculousness of the Qur'ān, the branch known as "obscurities" has contributed a great deal to the Qur'ān's ambiguity. It is more a source of incapacitation (تعجيز) than it is a source of miraculousness (إعجاز). This branch of science of the Qur'ān is called the "Obscurities of the Qur'ān."

"Obscurities of the Qur'ān" refers to words, phrases, and constructions in the Qur'ān that are obscure and appear in a manner that was not used in the Arabic language before. They are words that are not used in the regular meaning that the original forms of the word convey. As al-Rafi' says, they are "Perplexing to interpret, because they are not understood in the same way by those who use them, as well as by the majority of people. Together, their number in the Qur'ān amounts to 700 words, or slightly more."[133] Similarly, al-Suyuti, when emphasising the obscureness of these words, remarks that the Arabs, the "…masters of pure language, both those who were present at the revelation of the Qur'ān or those who it reached, were at a loss with the words which they didn't know the meaning of."[134]

The obscurities in the Qur'ān usually occur as strange words. Some of these words are not from the language of the Quraysh, and some are not even from the language of the Arabs at all. They also occur in other things that al-Suyuti mentions, although this is not the place to cover them. They appear in the form of pronouns, declensions, correlations, and constructions that are used in a manner unheard of in the speech of the Arabs. Though the obscure words in the Qur'ān number into the hundreds, I will suffice here with mentioning only a few examples.

Abu 'Ubayda related from Ibrahim al-Taymi that Abu Bakr al-Siddique was asked about the meaning of His saying (Exalted is He): "And fruits and fodder/straw/grasses/weeds/herbage." (80:31) وَفَاكِهَةً وَأَبًّا

He replied, "Which sky will shield me and which ground will bear me, if I was to say something about the book of God of which I know not?"[135]

Al-Gharyabi related from Ibn Abbas, who said: "I understand the whole of the Qur'ān, except four things:

"washing of wounds/filth/refuse" (69:36) غِسْلِينٍ

"and piety/compassion/tenderness" (19:13) وَحَنَانًا

"Tender/Soft-hearted/Pious/Given to prayer" (9:114) لَأَوَّاهٌ

"Valley called Raqeem/Tablet/Letter/Inscription." (18:9) وَالرَّقِيمِ

Among the other obscure words are the following:

"قلوبنا غُلف"
"ما ننسخ"
"مثابة"
"حِنفًا"
"بهتانًا"

[133] Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafi'i, "The Miraculousness of the Qur'ān", p 34.
[134] Jalal al-Din Al-Suyuti "Perfection in the Sciences of the Qur'ān", 1/119
[135] Jalal al-Din Al-Suyuti "Perfection in the Sciences of the Qur'ān", 1/119

"غير متجانفٍ"
"مدرارًا"
"يضاهئون"
"صنوان"
"جُذاذًا"
"كَطيِّ السجلِّ"
"ثاني عِطْفه"
"هيهات هيهات"
"الأجداث"
"زخرفًا"
"برزخ"
"رواكد"
"يوبقهن"
"ذي المعارج"
"سبلًا"
"جَدُّ ربنا"
"فلا يخاف بخْسًا"
"ولا رهقًا"
"كثيبًا مهيلًا"
"وبيلًا"
"شواظ"
"يطمثهن"
"نضّاختان"
"رفرفٍ خضر"
"مترفين"
"فَرَوْح ورَيحان"
"نبرأها"
"لا تجعلنا فتنة للذين كفروا"
"انفقوا"
"ومن يتّق الله يجعل له مخرجًا"
"عتت"
"فسحقًا"
"لو تُدهن فيدهنون"
"زنيم"
"يوم يُكشف عن ساق"
"مكظوم"
"مذموم"
"ليزلقونك"
"طغى الماء"
"يوم عسير"
"أمشاج"
"مستطيرًا"
"قَمْطريرًا"

"رواسي"
"ألفافًا"
"جزاء وفاقًا "
"فُراتًا"
"المعصرات"
"كواعب"
"الرادفة"
"سَفَرة"
"قَضْبًا"
"عسعس"
"عِلِّيِّين"
"ضريع"
"حسير"
"يتمطّى"
"أترابًا"
"مرساها"
"ممنون"
"أرائك"
"معاذيره"[136]

All of these are Arabic words that appear in the Qur'ān. The dialect of the Quraysh is mixed with the dialects of other Arab tribes, but there are also foreign, non-Arabic words that exceed 100 in number, and that appear in the Qur'ān. Some examples are as follows:

"سندس"
"إستبرق"
"أباريق"
"أبْ"
"الأرائك"
"الأسباط"
"أكواب"
"الأوّاه"
"ربّانيّون"
"الرَّقيم"
"زنجبيل"
"سجِّيل"
"سرادق"
"غسَّاق"
"القسطاس"

[136] Jalal al-Din Al-Suyuti "Perfection in the Sciences of the Qur'ān", 1/119-142

"مشكاة"
"صراط"

Now, are these obscure words, whether Arabic or foreign, signs of the miraculousness of the Qur'ān? How is it right for the Qur'ān to make the challenge of bringing forth the likes of it when it contains jargon that is unknown? Is this inimitability, or just inability?

Where is the clarity in this? In the very terminology of the Qur'ān, where is the "making things clear" in this? "'Alif Lam Ra' these are the verses of the book that makes things clear."[137] How can the Qur'ān be described as making things clear when it is not clear? Or is lack of clarity making things clear whether we like it or not, in the fashion of "believe Allah and disbelieve the stomach of your brother?"

The strange thing is that, instead of being assailed by doubts about these anomalies, the first Muslims carried the beacon to every corner they reached and strove gallantly to defend them. Here the patching-up and the waffling reached its furthest extent without them being aware of it. Naturally, they thought they were doing what was right. But with some of them, the matter didn't stop at defence, and they started to extol the virtues of every obscure verse—in fact, they made this obscureness amongst the signs of miraculousness!

One of the most astonishing things said about this miraculousness is what ibn Jarir related through an authentic chain from Abu Maysara, the renowned Tabi'i (follower), who said: "The Qur'ān contains every language."[138]

A similar thing is related from Sa'id ibn Jubayr and Wahb ibn Munabbih: "This is an indication of the wisdom behind the appearance of these words in the Qur'ān, because it encompasses the knowledge of the first and the last, and relates everything, and so it must have in it a reference to all the various dialects and languages so as to complete the fact that it encompasses all things. So the most sweet of them, the most sublime of them, and most well-used by the Arabs, were selected for it."[139]

Al-Suyuti adds that ibn al-Naqib expressed that same view, and said: "Amongst the special qualities of the Qur'ān over and above all the other revealed books of Allah, Most High, which were only revealed in the language of the people who it was revealed to and contained nothing of the language of others, is that the Qur'ān encompasses all the dialects of the Arabs. Also, much was revealed in the languages of others, such as the Romans, Persians, and Abyssinians."[140]

Al-Suyuti reiterates this by saying, "The Prophet (peace be upon him) was sent to every nation, and He, Most High, said, 'We have not sent a prophet except in the language of his people.' (14:4) So the book sent to all nations had to contain the languages of every nation."[141]

Can you see this clowning about? This logic which, by my life, is stranger than the spurious, obscure words of the Qur'ān? Can you see this unjust disarming of the people of the clear Arabic language by the spurious speech that

[137] (12:1)
[138] Ibidem 1/142
[139] The previous reference
[140] The previous reference 1/143-142
[141] The previous reference 1/143

they do not know from every language? And, if they know its meaning, they cannot savour it properly, for it is not from the foundations of their clear language?

❖

*Weakness of the Qur'ān:*

The final nail in the coffin regarding the inadequacy of the Qur'ān is its linguistic weakness. Yes, weakness! Indeed, we find it very hard to accept this, and you will accuse me of bias against the book of Allah. The Qur'ān is the epitome of eloquence, pure speech and elucidation, to the extent that millions upon millions believe that its language is of a superhuman nature! So how can it be weak when the enemies of the Qur'ān did not notice that point when they were all pursuing its flaws? This is unreasonable, this is unreasonable!

However, these enemies met with one of two fates: They could have died in the battles that broke out between the Muslims, so that the polytheists and their objections were lost or destroyed, and their words have not reached us. Alternatively, they entered Islam amongst those who entered, and were absorbed into the general, pious atmosphere, with its enormous defensive imperatives and apologetic mechanisms. They resorted to quoting evidence from Jahiliyyah (pre-Islamic) poetry to attest to the soundness of the weak text. They even celebrated that it contains eloquent nuances and great wisdoms that our minds cannot comprehend.

By itself, faith is able to do wonders—but what if it is aided by a mind well-versed in study and speculation? On top of that, what if this weak speech was repeated continuously, to the extent that daily usage polished it, and constant repetition sanctified it with sacredness, smoothing out its unevenness and covering its flaws with embellishment? After this, it then reaches the status of the inherited legacy, the intimately familiar, and the cultural conventions. Thus, despite you and I, or despite even the greatest scholars of language and masters of eloquence and experts in their field, it gains access to the very heart of the Arabic language and its innermost sanctity, with no-one having any say or choice about it. It becomes part of linguistic good taste, and is produced as an example and yardstick for comparison. So take heed, O those of insight!

He (Most High) said when detailing His bounty towards man and the ungratefulness of man to this bounty: "He it is Who makes you travel by land and sea; until when you are in the ships, and they sail on with them in a pleasant breeze, and they rejoice. A violent wind overtakes them and the waves come on them from everywhere, and they become certain (or think) that they will be overwhelmed, and they call to Allah, making their faith pure for Him: 'If You deliver us from this, we will most certainly be of the grateful ones!' But when He delivers them, lo! Behold! They rebel in the earth wrongfully." (10:22-23)

The aspect of weakness—nay, feebleness—in the previous verses is the poor use of pronouns, which, if had come from you or I, would be attributed to our ignorance, and we would be accused of lack of linguistic knowledge.

They would advise us to study the science of grammar afresh. But if it comes from the Qur'ān, then it is eloquence—nay, they dedicate to it its very own branch from the branches of eloquence!

The branch that concerns us here is the branch of Iltifaat (sudden transition or change). Here is the previous verse again, so you can see where the error is—that is, if you haven't already noticed it by yourself. It is, after all, a screaming error that is not possible for anyone to hear without it jarring in his ears: "He it is Who makes you travel by land and sea; until when you are in the ships, and they sail with them…" Instead of, "and they sail with you," and "you rejoice" instead of "they rejoice."

Believe it or not, this jarring is part of the eloquence of the Qur'ān. If it wasn't for these two lame words, the eloquence of the Qur'ān would not be apparent! It is not jarring, except in our twisted minds. It is "Iltifaat," and "Iltifaat" is a branch of the branches of eloquence that was invented so as to provide an escape route for this verse and its like.

There is another branch called "The Style of the All-Wise." The Prophet was asked about the phases of the moon (the changing appearance of the moon from one day to another). Instead of explaining it to them in a way they could understand (and if he did that correctly, then that would have been a real miracle), he evaded the answer they hoped to hear from the One who created the phases of the moon. Instead, he received from Him a disappointing reply that both the old and young already knew: "They ask you concerning the phases of the moon. Say: 'They are but signs to mark fixed periods of time in (the affairs of) men, and for Pilgrimage.'"[142]

What an extraordinary astonishing answer! God created the phases of the moon so that people can count time for their affairs, such as agriculture, trade, menstrual periods of their women, when to fast and to break fast, and for their pilgrimage to the sacred house, as the exegetes say!

Fine. If that is the case, then I wonder how we can we explain the changing appearance of the moon—nay, the *moons*—around Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, and the other planets? Are there humans like us on these planets who perform Hajj to the Ka'ba and who have concerns and affairs as we do, such as our women who have menstruation cycles and count the time when they are free from menstruation, ready for prayer and fasting?

The truth is that the worst method of counting time is to count it by Lunar phases, which we have suffered from and which has caused a division that there is no hope of repairing. Not to mention that this reply is a glaring affirmation of a geocentric universe, and a single sun and a single moon, and a single form of worship and religious rites. Thus the Qur'ān diverted them from what they were actually asking about, towards that which they were not asking about. It diverted them from gaining knowledge about things they didn't know towards things they already knew.

The knowledgeable in eloquence were truly shocked by this reply, and yet they couldn't be shocked. How could they be shocked when it has come from the presence of an All-Wise and All-Knowing Being? So they retreated like sheep to the pen, and exchanged the duty to be critical so that truth and correct understanding may prevail, in exchange for idiocy and stupidity.

Indeed, Allah avoided the answer on the pretext of disciplining, guiding, and teaching them the right way to ask a question! Never mind that this reply displays contempt and scorn towards the questioner. In my view, it is a reply that has no meaning other than an attempt to stifle questioning. It is as though asking questions is an

[142] (2:189) Note this verse does not strictly fall into the category of weak speech, but is cited here to highlight the sophistry, waffling, and patching-up.

unforgivable sin. It is a blatant disregard for mankind's longing to understand the reasons behind what we see. Allah is the All-Wise who knows the needs of His servants, and He makes clear to us the style by which we must address Him. This is the "Style of the All-Wise," and it is also a branch from amongst the branches of eloquence.

This poor art of eloquence! How many have spoken falsely in its name? How many have told lies and fabrications about it? It seems al-Mutanabbi was well aware of this game played by the scholars of language, for his poetry was criticised by some of the grammarians when he made a grammatical mistake. Al-Mutanabbi fumed with rage, and replied to the grammarian with audacious self-confidence, "It is up to me to say what I like, and up to you to cite evidence of it being correct." In other words, he was saying, "Isn't that what you do with the Qur'ān? Rules are the same for the little people as for the masters. Go back to your tribe and people of little ones!"

In my opinion, the most important reason for the flourishing of the science of eloquence in Islam is the defence of the Qur'ān in any way possible, including the desire to provide solutions for its flaws. This is not done for the pure sake of knowledge, or truth, or elucidation, for they came across so much in it that bewildered them and troubled their minds. If it had been in any other book, this would have caused them to doubt it, and the book would have been publicly defamed to an extreme extent. But what can they do, for it has been revealed by an Almighty, All-Knowing One? "An Arabic Qur'ān without crookedness." This is the incontestable of incontestables, which no Muslim can forsake!

Every Muslim of sincere faith will doubt himself rather than doubt his Qur'ān, no matter what thoughts come to his mind about the Qur'ān. It is not possible to defame the Qur'ān, or even pause to question it. So here comes the science of eloquence, elucidation, and marvels to repair what has ruptured, mend what has broken, fill in the holes, and fix what has come apart and become disordered. This must be done so that there are neither ruptures, nor gaps, nor cracks, nor holes in the Qur'ān. There are only the shortcomings of our human minds. The science of eloquence and elucidation can vouch for complete verification in this matter.

With nonsense, sophistry, and waffling, you can discover what you want, and hide what you want to hide. You can do what you want, and explain what you want, and convey what you want, and smooth out every crookedness you wish to smooth out.

I always say, "Give me a madman, and I can bring out the wisdoms of the first and last from his speech." But it appears that the exegetes, who have been raised on more than one school of the schools of pure speech and eloquence, who bore the responsibilities of the embellishment of eloquence and marvels and meanings, beat me to the task by a long way!

*"Whoso disbelieves in Allah after his belief save him who is forced thereto and whose heart is content with the Faith but whoso opens (his) breast to disbelief on them is wrath from Allah and for them a mighty punishment."*

*(16:106)*

I implore you, by all you hold dear: did you understand anything of that? I said to myself, "Perhaps this verse has a mistake in transcription, or perhaps there is a word missing or corrupted." So I went to examine many different copies of manuscripts that were written at different periods to see if I could find some difference between them. However, it was in vain, for there was complete accord between all of the manuscripts of all the times and places. Is this really the speech of the Lord of the Worlds, who challenged man and jinn to bring the likes of it? May God help the exegetes who have to chisel through rock with their fingernails to get a tiny bit of water!

All Muslims from the East to the West recite this verse every day, morning, and evening in their prayers and worship. They hear it in recitations of the Noble Qur'ān, without any of them sensing any weakness in it, or feeling confused or jarred.

Indeed, the blades of arrows are breaking against blades of arrows[143], so that the believer no longer cares on which side falls his mortal blow. His linguistic sensitivity has become dulled, his taste slipshod, his instincts feeble. Truly, his awareness of grating disharmony has died whenever verses of the Qur'ān are concerned, but they remain intact and healthy regarding everything else. Everything in him is still in its original, natural disposition. Nay, it has become more refined and accomplished. He has acquired skills, expertise, and gifts in all things—except here, in this. For when faith reigns supreme, reason diminishes. And faith can do what reason cannot!

In all honesty, I confess that I wasn't fully attentive to this verse and many others like it until now. If it hadn't been for the fact that I, in a pragmatic way, studied the Qur'ān critically and analytically, examining it verse by verse, and if I hadn't divided them into categories and indices for this purpose, the veil would have remained over my eyes. So what do you say about the faithful who pay no attention to this? Don't you see that large numbers of Muslim thinkers and university professors are no less ardent in their conviction in the fairytale of the Miraculous Nature of the Qur'ān than any ordinary person? They are not in a position to dissect the Qur'ān and tear open the shrouds that envelope it. No, they are not capable of doing that.

The reading the Qur'ān can be of two types: firstly, there is devotional reading that is blind to the flaws that would make eyes grow wide when they witness the contradiction of what is reasonable and acceptable. If there is any deep thinking in this type of reading, then it is the deep thinking for the defense and justification of the verse in order to find the wisdom of the ages. Secondly, there is investigative, critical, and analytical reading that exposes flaws. It puts our hands on that which the faithful do not want to see or acknowledge, and, for that reason, they try to dodge and maneuver to conceal its defects with all kinds of excuses, pretexts, and justifications! Perhaps this book can bring about within them—or within some of them, at least—a painful jolt. After all, there is a new form of therapy administered through shocks!

Here is another verse for you that is similar to the previous verse in weakness and feebleness, even though understanding it is not difficult. So let your eyes peruse it in the hope that you may be more skilled linguistically and more eloquently capable than I. But distance yourself from the blessed exegetes who do not find any flaw nor fault in it. There is no harm in consulting the books of Tafseer to a degree. In fact, you should consult them, so long as it is with extreme caution:

*It is He Who sends down water from the skies, then We bring forth with it buds of every kind, then we bring forth from it green (foliage) from which We bring forth grain, piled up.*

*(6:99)*

Did you notice anything odd when you heard this verse? This verse contains two divine secrets—or two examples of exemplary eloquence, if you prefer. The first is the eloquence of "Iltifaat," as shown here: "It is He Who sends down water from the skies, then We bring forth..." The second is repetition of the verb "bring forth" three times. A repetition that tears at the ear and makes it feel uneasy and uncomfortable. Perhaps uneasiness and

[143] From a line of poetry by al-Mutanabbi—it means he has been struck by so many arrows (of misfortune and sorrow) that the ones that strike him now have no place to pierce and are just hitting the ones already there.

discomfort are amongst the signs of Miraculousness? Had ibn Muqaffa' or al-Jahiz, or others from amongst the princes of eloquence, fallen to such depths of feebleness, they would have ripped them apart and heaped upon them criticism and vitriol. But what can one do when polishing, repetition, and devotional recitation has bequeathed to the faithful dullness of taste and the inability to sense the jarring?

*"And when your Lord called out to Musa: Go to the unjust people, the people of Pharaoh. Will they not guard (against evil)?"*

*(26:10-11)*

And in Musa's dialogue with Pharaoh, Pharaoh asked him this:

*"(Pharaoh) said, 'Did we not bring you up as a child among us, and you tarried among us for (many) years of your life? And you did your deed which you did...' He (Moses) said, 'I did it... So I fled from you when I feared you, then my Lord granted me wisdom and made me of the messengers. And that is a favour of which you bestowed upon me[144] that you have enslaved the children of Israel.'"*

*(26:18-22)*

The puzzle here is in the last verse; the verses that precede it lead to it. Read it, and then read it again. Read it two, three, four, and ten times, and keep on reading it as long as you want. Then tell me honestly and sincerely if you understand anything, and I will be most grateful.

How can enslavement be a blessing bestowed by Pharaoh upon Moses? If I want to give this verse meaning, then it should something like the following: "And that is a favour of which God has bestowed upon me," meaning: "That He made me one of the messengers is a blessing that He bestowed upon me."

As for the last bit of the verse, "that you have enslaved the children of Israel," it is a distortion that has no meaning to it. Or it may be the remainder of an abrogated verse, or something similar. Yet, the scribes, reciters, and readers have accepted it in the manner it appears in the Qur'ān, just as the deaf, dumb, and blind would accept what is presented to them without objection or opposition. Indeed, they say, "All of it is from our Lord," and the exegetes follow in their footsteps, and do not dare to make any change in it. They become masters at inventing all sorts of meanings for it. Not one of them says, "Don't sweat over it, for the verse, as it is phrased, has no meaning!"

Likewise, read the following bewildering verse, and read it again and again, and tell me if you understand anything:

*"Say: 'He who is in the heavens and the earth does not know the unseen, except Allah, and they do not know when they shall be raised. Nay, but does their knowledge reach to the Hereafter? Nay, they are in doubt about it. Nay, they are blind to it.'"*

*(27:65-66)*

Is there even an atom's weight of eloquence in that verse? Can speech get any more confused, convoluted, weak, and garbled than this? By my life, it is miraculousness due to lack of miraculousness!

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[144] The verb "Manna" ( مَنَّ) means "To bestow favours, blessings, be kind, gracious etc..." The verse says: "And that is a favour which you bestowed upon me" ( وتلك نعمةٌ تمنُّها عليَّ). Obviously this makes no sense, and so some translators have translated it as "And that is a favour which you <reproach> me". Apart from being a strange translation—it too makes no sense. How can one reproach someone for something they didn't do? Not to mention that the person doing the reproaching is the one who did the act himself!?

I do not deny that this verse and its like amongst the baffling verses must have a meaning, but its meaning remains hidden in the mind of its author. The words, as they stand, are not able to uncover it due to its weakness, confusion, and convolutedness. As a consequence, the verse is unable to clearly express what was intended. This is what has left the door open for the waffle, nonsense, and fabrications of the exegetes.

This not eloquence, nor is it miraculousness. What we have in front of us is shameful weakness. Where is the wondrous fluency that we find with al-Jahiz? Where is the eloquent, fluid command of the Arabic language that is present in a non-Arab writer like ibn Muqaffa', who never once claimed that it was revealed from the presence of an All-Wise, All-Knowing? To the extent that the meaning remains obscure, we can measure its deficiency; by the extent of its lucidity, we can measure its eloquence.

*"And when Musa said to his servant: 'I will not cease until I reach the point where the two seas meet, or I will go on for ages.' So when they reached the point where the two met, they forgot their fish, and it took its way through the sea freely. So when they had gone farther, he said to his servant: 'Bring to us our morning meal, certainly we have met with fatigue from this our journey.' He said: 'Did you see when we took refuge on the rock, and no-one made me forget it except Shaytan, to mention it.' And it took its way into the sea wonderously."*

*(18:60-63)*

They say that the speech of Allah does not contain anything superfluous. That the words are in exact proportion to the meanings, without surplus or deficiency! And yet this verse contains a surplus that creates a glaring imperfection. In my opinion, this is not just surplus, but a gross redundancy, as occurs in many verses of the Qur'ān. The sentence "no-one made me forget it except Shaytan," is quite sufficient to lead one to the sought-after meaning. So what is the "profound" wisdom in adding "to mention it?" And if the Qur'ān is so eager to include "to mention it," what is the point of the pronoun in "made me forget it?" It should have said: "and no-one made me forget it except Shaytan," or "and no-one made me forget to mention it, except Shaytan." However, combining the two together creates a discord that the tongue has to polish out, for all sensitivity to it has died.

*"And He has made subservient to you what is in the heavens and what is in the earth altogether, from Him. Indeed in that are signs for a people who reflect."*

*(45:13)*

I cannot see that the words "from Him" have any meaning or serve any purpose. It is redundancy on top of redundancy, and there is nothing more for the masters of eloquence to do other than to make "Redundancy" a chapter amongst the chapters of eloquence. Perhaps it is the tail end of another verse that has been abrogated, but the scribe left it there by mistake, and so it has crept into the text without it occurring to anyone to question it. It may be due to a wisdom that only Allah knows! And here enters the well-known sophistry and chicanery to bring it out from the wilderness of meaninglessness. They bestow upon it, falsely and erroneously, full meaning, thereby rescuing it from its affliction, even though this meaning is completely meaningless.

So they say, "He has made subservient to you... altogether, from Him" means: "He has made it subservient... in a state of being, from Himself, Most High!" In this case, it is denotative of state. Yet, no-one asks himself, "What is the reason for this circumstantial clause?" Is there a deception more devious than this sophistry, claiming it means "in a state of being, from Himself," O professors of sophism, instead of simply removing and deleting it from the text? But who dares to do that?

*"And those who disbelieve are driven to Hell in troops, 'till when they reach it its gates open, and its warders say to them, 'Did there not come to you messengers from amongst you, reciting to you the revelations of your Lord, and warning you of the meeting of this your Day?' They say, 'Yea, verily. But the word of doom of disbelievers is fulfilled.' It is said, 'Enter ye the gates of Hell, to dwell forever in it. How terrible is the journey's end of the arrogant.'"*

*"And those who keep their duty to their Lord are driven unto the Garden in troops, 'till when they reach it, and its gates open, and its warders say to them: 'Peace be unto you! You have done well, so enter it forever.' They say: 'Praise be to Allah, Who hath fulfilled to us His promise, and has made us inherit the land so that we may dwell in the Garden where we will! How excellent is the reward of the workers.'"*

*"And you will see the angels thronging 'round the Throne, hymning the praises of their Lord. And judgment shall be given between them in truth, and it will be said: 'Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds!'"*

*(39:71-75)*

These verses would be, in my opinion, among the splendid verses if it wasn't for two flaws that spoil their beauty, like a young woman of dazzling beauty with hair growth on her lip and chin. But, again, the constant repetition of these verses on the tongues has hidden these flaws, as make-up hides the blemishes of a beautiful woman.

There is an imbalance between the verses that describes the unbelievers entering Hell and the God-fearing's entrance to Paradise. As the unbelievers are driven to Hell and arrive at it, the gates open for them. Arriving leads to the gates opening. In other words, there is a prepositive clause (arriving), which is immediately followed by the consequential clause. But that doesn't happen in the parallel verse of those who are God-fearing, for the verses that describe their arrival are, at least on the surface, a collection of prepositive clauses without a following consequence clause, even though the consequence is understood by deduction. The consequential clause in the first verses is understood, both in wording and deduction. But as for the remaining verses, the consequential clause is only understood by deduction.

In other words, the verse of the "God-fearing" contains an extra conjunctive "and" (واو العطف) that spoils the whole scene to the extent that one might think this verse has no conditional response to it. In the first verse, the conditional response comes instantly: "'till when they reach it, its gates open," while there is no conditional response in the second verse, due to the insertion of the Conjunctive Particle: "'till when they reach it, and its gates open." So how did this cumbersome "and" sneak in here? They say it is redundant, but it is a redundancy placed upon the people of Paradise who are eager to know their destiny! If you or I did such a thing, it would be considered to be due to our inadequacy. But if the Qur'ān does it, then it is miraculousness. Poor you and I!

The second flaw in these verses is the verb "driven," which is used for herding cattle, and cannot be applied to humans.[145] But just as the likes of donkeys, mules, and cattle are driven, so are humans in the Qur'ān. If only the

[145] Had the verb "To Drive/Herd" not been used for both the believers and unbelievers, one might have been able to argue Allah used poetic license to highlight the rough handling of the unbelievers.

mistake had only happened once! However, this incorrect term is applied equally to "those who disbelieve" and "the God-fearing." It is an equal treatment that is of extreme injustice, and contains utter contempt for the "God-fearing." Isn't the reward for goodness goodness? Or is there, in this affair, a wisdom that is hidden from reason and the mind? It is as though the waffling exegetes sensed the ugliness of this equal treatment and what it contains of faultiness and injustice to the right of the God-fearing, and so they patched up the second verse by adding the interpretation, "gently." So they said it means, "Those who disbelieve are driven violently to Hell in troops," while, "Those who keep their duty to their Lord are driven gently to Paradise in troops," forgetting that "herd-driving" is "herd-driving," whether it is done with violence or gentleness!

*"Say: 'Do you indeed disbelieve in Him, Who created the earth in two days, and set up equals with Him? That is the Lord of the Worlds.'"*

*"And He made in it mountains above it, and blessed it and measured therein its foods in four days, alike for those who ask."*

*"Then turned He to the heaven when it was smoke, and said to it and to the earth, 'Come, both of you, willingly or unwillingly.' They said, 'We come willingly.'"*

*"Then, He ordained them seven heavens in two days, and inspired in each heaven its mandate, and We adorned the lower heaven with lamps to guard. That is the measuring of the Mighty, the Knowing."*

*(41:9-12)*

These verses, like their predecessors, combine ambiguity with weakness. More precisely, its ambiguity stems from its weakness and from contradicting other verses in the Qur'ān. Actually, the reverse could also be true: its weakness and contradictions could stem from its ambiguity. The lack of a clear image in the mind of the author creates confusion and distortion when one tries to fathom the text's meaning, as the words stumble haphazardly this way and that. The meanings are scattered far from the words. The numbers of days conflict with the calculations in other verses. Indeed, the text has lost its way to the extent that one could expect anything next. One cannot see anything other than the jumping, the breaking up of the flow, and the halting on the course towards its goals. This happens in this verse we are discussing, and in other similar verses that suffer from fragmentation and dislocation.

Everything the Qur'ān describes in relation to the number of days in which Allah created the world specifies the number as six days apart from this verse. Just as all the verses connected to the number of days of creation in the Qur'ān deal directly with the topic without superfluous or detracting material, except for here. Ignoring the dislocation of this verse and its lack of connection to what is before and after it, as the Qur'ān has gotten us accustomed to doing, it has a strange beginning: "Say: 'Do you...'" Is this a question? Or a rhetorical expression of astonishment? Or is it an assertion of fact? Or what? Please enlighten me, and I will be very grateful!

Likewise, these verses are an incongruity, combining disparate elements. There is an allusion to the polytheists, who disbelieve that God created the Earth in two days, and who go even further still, setting up partners

to Him. After that comes the clarification that the one who created all of this is the Lord of the Worlds. He then followed that by strengthening the Earth with the mountains and apportioning its sustenance in four days.

Thus, the Earth alone required 6 days of continuous work from Him (Glorified is He), and it deserves such effort from Him (Most High is He) due to its fundamental importance in the universe, as was the understanding of people in ancient times. Why not? Since it is the centre of the universe, it is its beating heart. As for the remainder of creation, they are trivial things: a sun, a moon, and seven heavens that are decorated with a number of stars so that people can use them when traveling by land or sea. Exactly two days is quite enough for all of that.

Believe it or not, the creation of the heavens only took two days. So long as it wasn't made of cardboard, but from thin paper, which is more than sufficient for the angels who don't have heavy, stomping feet like humans. They have gentle, ethereal feet that they don't use for walking. Instead, they have delicate wings that make walking unnecessary, which reminds me of the verse of a French poet when describing his beloved: "By God, how gentle are her feet—she walks upon the pasture without it knowing!"

In conclusion, after completing the creation of the Earth in six days, Allah created the Seven Heavens in two days, then sprinkled the stars here and there in the lower heaven to make it look beautiful. He didn't bother with adorning the other heavens, it would appear. They have to remain dark, since the heavens are the abode of the angels, and they don't need lights, because the angels have bodies made of light! Perhaps the stars of the lower heaven are made of wax, considering the short time it took to create the heavens. The verse then concludes all that with: "That is the measuring of the Mighty, the Knowing." So blessed be Allah, the Best of Creators.

The exegetes were confused when it came to understanding these verses that extended the number of days for the creation into eight days. They had to determine how to reconcile them with all the other verses that specified six days only. So they said: the four days in which Allah blessed the earth, made mountains and measured out its sustenance (mentioned in Verse 10) includes the two days he created the earth (mentioned in Verse 10). An artful solution, no doubt. But if that is correct, then doesn't it show clearly and plainly the weakness of the Qur'ān, which could surely use wording that would be much clearer and eloquent? And yet it fell short of clarity and eloquence, and fell into weakness and ambiguity. It is especially strange, since clarity is supposed to be an inseparable attribute of the Qur'ān, as repeated over and over again, "In a clear Arabic language." It should be noted here that the Qur'ān assumes the earth took much longer to form than the rest of the universe, when, in fact, the reverse is true.

*"And We certainly sent Noah and Abraham, and gave to their offspring prophethood and the Book, and some of them were on right guidance, but many of them are transgressors."*

*"Then in their footsteps We followed them up with Our messengers, and We caused Jesus, the son of Mary to follow on, and gave him the Gospel, and We placed in the hearts of those who followed him compassion and mercy. But (as for) monasticism, they invented it. We did not ordain it for them, except so as to seek Allah's pleasure. But they didn't observe it correctly. So We gave those who believe their reward, but many of them are transgressors." (57:26-27)*

It is not possible for anyone who delves into the confusing verses of the Qur'ān to pass by the last verse safely. In the end, one does not know whether monasticism is an invention of the Christians, or whether Allah decreed it for them and ordered them to do it. Strangely, the Qur'ān combines both contradictory positions, and then confirms the two opposing views. So how can it have any true meaning? How can they have invented it, while, at the same time, Allah decreed it for them?

The exegetes are able to turn things on their head and do anything they like without anyone speaking a single word of criticism. They doubt themselves without ever daring to doubt the verse: "Its knowledge is with my Lord. My Lord never errs, nor is He unmindful." To give it a modicum of logic, they said in explanation, "We didn't ordain it for them, except so as to seek Allah's pleasure." One must add an inferred sentence like this: "We did not ordain it for them, but they did it except so as to seek Allah's pleasure." They gave it meaning when it didn't have meaning. But would that they hadn't, because no-one is convinced by this meaning, for "can the perfume seller be of any use to that which time has made go off?"[146] And since when was confusion amongst the signs of miraculousness?

It is as though this confusion is not enough. As though weakness is an important requirement of eloquence. For that reason, Divine Wisdom demanded (as a fitna to the disbelievers) that this weakness should be followed by more weakness to increase the confusion of the Qur'ān, only a single verse after the previous ones:

*"O you who believe! Fear Allah, and believe in His Messenger, and He will give you two portions of His mercy, and make for you a light with which you can walk, and forgive you, and Allah is Forgiving, Merciful."*

*"So that the People of the Book will know that they have no power over anything of the bounty of Allah, and that the bounty of Allah is in the hand of Allah--He gives it to who He wills--and Allah is the possessor of abundant grace."*

*(57:28-29)*

This verse contains two perplexing riddles, and I don't know which one is greater than the other. They are placing the Mufassirun in an unenviable position. It appears that the Qur'ān takes great pleasure in driving these poor creatures to despair, leaving them unable to do anything other than waffle.

The first riddle is this bewildering لئلّا (so that not), which here has taken on the quality of quicksilver, leaving you unable to find any meaning or purpose to it. What makes this riddle even worse for the Mufassirun is that it hardly unloads its content in their minds, seizing them by the collars, when it is followed a second puzzle, even more perplexing: the incorrect case ending on the verb يقدرون. It should be يقدروا. . It is as though it is an earthquake followed by another, such as the Qur'ān speaks of in Surah al-Nazi'at: "The day on which the quaking shall quake, followed by another," (79: 6-7) and, "hearts that day shall palpitate," all of them signs of the Last Hour—and I seek refuge with God. May God save us from its horrors!

How wretched are these patient Mufassirun, and how arduous are their tasks and the burdens that have been flung onto their shoulders! Never did one word of complaint issue from them. Never did they grumble or object. They fearlessly stepped forward and dived into the depths of the sea to gather the word of God, and to comprehend, according to the limits of human capacity, the dimensions and the objectives which it contains. And each diver came back with new pearls, better than the ones of their colleagues.

Indeed, the meaning of the last verse is plain only on the condition that you don't notice any of the phrasing that burdens it and takes away its meaning. The negative particle لئلّا (so that not) is a superfluous particle that has no

[146] "Can the perfume seller be of any use to that which time has made go off?" is an Arabic saying applied to things we cannot change no matter how hard we try.

meaning here. Nay, it is misleading, and harms the verse greatly, turning it into a puzzle and a riddle, even though the intended meaning is very simple. Just as having the nun(نون) denoting the nominative case ending on the present tense verb يقدرون (they are able/have power), despite it being in the accusative (because of ألّا , which is أنْ plus لا , which means the verb that follows must be in the accusative and it should يقدروا , not يقدرون), is another misleading error.

The Qur'ān is simply saying: "So that the People of the Book know that they have no power at all over the bounty of God." But superfluous phrasing has burdened it heavily, to the extent that it has robbed it of what remains of meaning. Who knows? Maybe superfluous phrasing is amongst the signs of miraculousness. So whenever you over-do superfluous phrasing, you are increasing the miraculousness. But only the few can be so skilled in superfluous phrasing.

*Nun. I swear by the pen and what they write,*

*You are not, by the grace of your Lord, mad.*

*Verily, for you is a reward unfailing.*

*Indeed, you are of a tremendous nature.*

*Soon you will see, and they will see,*

*With which of you is the mad one.*

*(68: 1-6)*

These verses contain a simple, straightforward meaning, the narrative of which flows gently and beautifully through it, but is disgracefully disturbed in the final verse for a wisdom that only Allah knows. The Qur'ān insists, as usual in similar instances, on leaving me standing totally perplexed in front of it. It insists on destroying what it has built up, and undermining what it has accomplished, according to the principle of "God only raises something to

bring it down."[147] That is what this inauspicious preposition بَ ("Ba" - by/with) has done here: "By/With which of you is the mad one (بأيّكم المفتون)."Although the deaf, dumb, and blind deny that there is any redundancy in the speech of Allah, this preposition is, indeed, redundant, whether they like it or not. That is, of course, if the meaning of the segment is: "Soon you will see, and they will see, which of you is the mad one."

If the use of the preposition بَ here is not redundant, then we have another problem, and that is the word "mad (مفتون)," since it is a word that has no meaning here. The correct word should be the verbal noun, "madness (فتون)." For example, you can say, "Which of you is the mad one?" But if you use the preposition بَ (by/with), then you have to say: "Which of you is by/with madness?" Is the madness with you, O Muhammad, or with them? The fact is that the Mufassirun who put forward this view have corrected "the speech of Allah," even though they think they are merely explaining it. If not then, it has no meaning.

Regardless of whether we adopt this explanation or that (whether we consider the preposition "by/with" redundant or consider "mad" to mean "madness"), the verse in its original form is defective and weak, and lacks proper meaning. That is, of course, as long as there is not some hidden purpose to it.

Here is another correction to the speech of God that the waffling prattlers made while thinking that they were merely explaining it:

*But nay! I swear by the Lord of the Easts and the Wests that We are certainly able,*

*to substitute better than they and We are not to be beaten.(وما نحن بمسبوقين )*

*(70: 40-41)*

The Mufassirun say it means: "And We are not unable to do that."(وما نحن بعاجزين )

If the Qur'ān really meant that, then why did it miss the mark and choose another phrase that means something different? Why did it select one that is inappropriate and has no relation to the desired meaning in any way? Why didn't it say, "And We are not unable to do that?" Isn't that more eloquent and clear, O masters of eloquence? The truth is that the Mufassirun had no choice other than to use this word to rescue the verse. What a predicament! And how plentiful are these predicaments that the Qur'ān places them in. That is, if there isn't some "profound wisdom" behind it, hidden from the Ancients and the Moderns, that the Lord of the Worlds has kept to himself.

Is this truly the word of God? Is this what man and jinn were challenged to bring the likes of? If the Qur'ān was composed entirely of masterpieces, it wouldn't be so bad, but the masterpieces are like broken links strewn in open spaces, or oases dotted about a vast desert that has no beginning or end.

Furthermore, even if the Qur'ān had been composed entirely of masterpieces, the challenge still has no meaning, since masterpieces cannot be imitated. One can only bring literature that is better, worse, or of a similar

[147] Reference to the hadith: "The Prophet had a she-camel called al-Adba, which could not be beaten in a race. Once, a bedouin came on a young camel of his and beat al-Adba in a race. The Muslims became very distressed about that, and said, 'It beat al-Adba!' So the Prophet said, 'It is Allah's right/law that He only raises something in the world to bring it down.'"

level, but it is impossible to bring the same as it. So what about if these masterpieces are like these that adorn the Qur'ān? Indeed, the work of ibn Muqaffa' and al-Jahiz and Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi[148] are on a higher level of quality and excellence—so can anyone bring the same as it? Especially if we remember that we don't find in the speech of any of these the level of confusion, dislocation, weakness, and ambiguity that we find in the Qur'ān?

❖

*Contradiction is a Prominent Feature of the Qur'ān:*

If only the Qur'ān's issues went no further than the maladies we have mentioned! But there are other maladies even more serious. Perhaps the most important of these are the blatant contradictions. Yes, indeed, the Qur'ān is full of a variety of contradictions that it is not possible to keep quiet about. Indeed, contradiction is a prominent feature of the Qur'ān.

Below are some verses that combine ambiguity with contradiction:

"The month of Ramadan, in which the Qur'ān was revealed." (2:185) But it is well-known that the Qur'ān came down piecemeal, spread out in installments and at different times, and not as a single entity.[149] So what is the meaning of the Qur'ān being revealed in Ramadan, then? There is no solution to this contradiction, except through a fairy tale: so the Qur'ān was first on the "Preserved Tablet" (which came down as a whole in Ramadan), and from the "Preserved Tablet," it came down piecemeal to the lower heaven. Thus, the problem is solved with a stroke of the pen.

But on which day in Ramadan did the Qur'ān come down? "Indeed, we revealed it on the Night of Power." (1:97) As though the initial ambiguity is not enough, it is followed it with more ambiguity, intensifying the ambiguity and mystery. So it specified the descent of the Qur'ān as occurring on the "Night of Power," which is, itself, a collection of fairy tales: "And what will tell you what is the Night of Power? The Night of Power is better than a thousand nights. During it, the angels come down, and the spirit with the permission of their Lord with every decree. Peace it is until the break of day." (97:5-6)

Did you understand anything? So the ambiguity of the Qur'ān cannot be understood by the believer except with more ambiguity! Can you blame the Mufassirun after that if they don't find any way to remove this ambiguity, except through fairy tales? For in these myths is the escape from every ambiguity! And how many stories have been related about the "Night of Power," and how many victories has God accomplished for His beloved servants during the "Night of Power!"

[148] I was going to mention "al-Ma'arri" if he hadn't been ambiguous like the Qur'ān, though he remains on a unique level of excellence and flawlessness.

[149] For a Qur'ānic reference contradicting the assertion that the Qur'ān was sent down as a single entity, see verse 32 of Sura al-Furqan (25):
"Those who reject Faith say: Why is not the Qur'ān revealed to him all at once? Thus (is it revealed), that We may strengthen thy heart thereby, and We have rehearsed it to thee in slow, well-arranged stages, gradually." (25:32)

*"Wherever you may be, death will find you out, even if you are in lofty towers. If some good befalls them, they say, 'This is from Allah,' but if evil befalls them, they say, 'This is from you.' Say. 'All things are from Allah.' But what is the matter with these people that they hardly understand speech? Whatever good befalls you is from Allah, but whatever evil happens to you is from yourself and We have sent you as a messenger to the people. And enough is Allah for a witness."*

*(4: 78-79)*

The contradictory verses of the Qur'ān are usually spread far apart, dotted here and there with a great deal of distance separating them—except in a few cases, as in the two verses above. Here, the second verse comes straightaway to contradict the first, even before the first verse's echo has faded from the ear. Hardly has the first verse finished confirming that good and evil are both from Allah when the second verse immediately follows it to confirm the opposite: that only good comes from Allah, while evil comes from man!

The following two verses are in a similar vein to the previous two:

*"The idolaters will say, 'Had Allah willed, we would not have ascribed partners to Him, nor would our fathers have, nor would we have forbidden anything.' Likewise did those before them tell such lies till they tasted our punishment. Say, 'Have you any information that you can bring forth for us? Lo! You only follow conjecture and you only tell lies.'*

*Say: 'With Allah is the conclusive argument. If it had been His will, He could have certainly guided you all.'"*

*(6: 148-149)*

Yes, we have a thousand and one pieces of information, and all of them are based on many verses such as the last two, and those before it, and many others, for they are all a jumble of contradictions, embracing all that has been said, is said, and will be said regarding predestination and freewill until the Day of Judgment. Furthermore, what is the meaning of accusing them of "only following conjecture," or, in fact, worse than that: accusing them of lying?

So is relying on the four previous verses and many others conjecture and lying? Is this reasonable? And, amazingly, the verse concludes by confirming that which it negated at the beginning: "Had Allah willed, we would not have ascribed partners to Him...Likewise did those before them tell such lies..." and this is what it is blaming them for!

*"And the idolaters say,'Had Allah willed, we would not have worshipped anything beside Him, nor would our fathers have, nor would we have forbidden anything without Him. Thus did those before them do..."*

*(16:35)*

So is their saying, "Had Allah willed, we would not have ascribed partners to him," and "Had Allah willed, we would not have worshipped anything beside Him" conjecture? Is it lying? In fact, what they are saying is the truth; it is perfectly sound and reasonable. More than that, it is supported by the Qur'ān itself, whose utterances on this topic are

no more than a cocktail of contradictions that don't settle on one single viewpoint, and which has wearied and sapped the energy of the Mufassirun on nonsense that contains no benefit.

The Jews are the chosen people of God according to the text of the Qur'ān:

*"O Children of Israel! Remember my favour which I bestowed upon you, and that I favoured you over all other peoples."*

*(2: 47, 2:122)*

On the contrary! The Jews are not God's chosen people, but are just like the rest of humans beings:

*"Say: 'Oh, you who are Jews! If you claim that you are favoured of Allah to the exclusion of mankind, then long for death, if you are truthful."*

*(62:6)*

*"The Jews and the Christians say we are the children of God and His beloved ones. Say: 'Then why does He punish you for your sins? Nay! You are ordinary human beings, like the rest of those that He created. He forgives whoever He wants, and punishes whoever He wants, and to God belongs the dominion of the heavens and Earth, and all that is between them, and to Him is the end."*

*(5:18)*

And God will give His servants mastery over them until the Day of Judgment:

*"And when your Lord announced that He would certainly send against them until the Day of Judgment those who would subject them to severe torment. Your Lord is swift in retribution, and is indeed Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful."*

*(7:167)*

Despite this, they will be elevated over the earth after spreading corruption in it twice! I don't understand why that was limited to twice only if their lives have all been corruption and spreading mischief!

*"And We decreed for the Children of Israel in the Book: 'You will indeed spread corruption in the earth twice, and you will certainly be elevated with mighty elevation.'"*

*(17:4)*

"Eternity (الخلود)" in the Qur'ān is of three types, each one contradicting the other: Eternity that is unlimited and unending. Eternity that is limited so as to last as long as the Heavens and Earth do. Eternity that is limited to whatever Allah wants it to be limited to. So which of these types should we take seriously?

As for eternity that is unlimited, He said: "Allah will say: 'This is the Day when their truth shall benefit the truthful ones; they shall have gardens beneath which rivers flow to abide in them forever. Allah is well-pleased with them, and they are well-pleased with Allah; this is the mighty achievement." (5:119)

Then, there is the type of eternity that is limited to last as long as the Heavens and Earth do, which is the strangest one because there will not be any heavens or Earth at the time of Judgment, as they will be rolled up with advent of the Day of Judgment, disappearing without return. "The day we shall roll up the Heavens like a scroll rolled up for books..." (21:104) So how can Allah send people on the Day of Judgment to stay in a place for as long as the Heavens and Earth exist, when they have already ceased to exist?

Following it is the eternity that is restricted to the Will of Allah. By using this phrase, Allah has not specified anything. One could say He has completely undermined the whole concept of eternity and washed His hands of it, as He did with His "chosen people."

*"So as for those who will be wretched, they will be in the Fire; sighing and wailing will be their portion therein, forever in it, as long as the heavens and the earth endure, except as your Lord pleases. Surely your Lord is the mighty doer of what He intends."*

*(11:106-107)*

Oddly, the second and the third types are mentioned together in a single verse. If the second and third definitions of eternity are correct, then this is to the benefit of the wretched, since it sets a limit to their suffering.

*"But as for those who are blessed, they shall be in the Garden, forever in it, as long as the heavens and the earth endure, except as your Lord pleases, a gift without break." (11:108)*

If this is correct, then it is not to the benefit of "those who are blessed," because it makes "those who are wretched" better than them, since refraining from giving the wretched what was decreed and removing the punishment is sweeter than a period of pleasure that had been ordained as being forever which is then cut unexpectedly, tied to an arbitrary will that has no consistency nor continuity. But He is not to be questioned about what He does! This, by my life, more intensely stings the soul and causes it more pain than anything the wretched may suffer in the punishment of Jahannam. Where is the fairness in that?

*"Indeed, for those who do not believe in the signs of Allah, Allah will not guide them, and they shall have a painful torment." (16:104)*

Is this true? Nay! Is this reasonable? What is this astounding generalization? What is this absolute judgment that cannot be justified by logic or by reality? What about those who believed in the signs of Allah after being amongst those who didn't believe? Who guided them, then? Shaytan? Did they emerge from their mothers' wombs as believers? Doesn't this verse contradict the many other verses that cannot be counted, where Allah guides people to belief?[150]

*"They make it a favour on you that they have accepted Islam. Say, 'Do not bestow on me your acceptance of Islam. Nay! It is Allah who has bestowed upon you the favour, that He has guided you to Faith, if you are truthful."*

*(49:17)*

*"And hold fast to the rope of Allah all together, and do not be divided, and remember Allah's favour on you when you were enemies and He joined your hearts so that, by His Grace, you became brothers. And you were on the brink of the Pit of Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus does Allah make His Signs clear to you so that you may be guided."*

*(3:103)*

How truly amazing are these verses, how like those mentioned in point eight above, that declare that those who disbelieve, and the polytheists, transgressors, the astray, and the misguiders at the time that Islam appeared will not be guided, even though the majority of those who entered it were disbelievers before, or transgressors, or astray? So who guided them, then, after they were not of the guided? Didn't Allah say repeatedly that He is the One who bestowed upon them faith and guided them to the straight path?

The strange thing is that these verses are repeated many times in the Qur'ān until one imagines that it is the result of outburst and emotion rather than the result of deep thought and reflection.

*"Whoever God guides, then he will be guided, while whoever He misguides, then he will never find helpers other than Him. And We shall gather them on the Day of Judgment upon their faces, blind, dumb, and deaf. Their abode will be Jahannam. Every time it abates, We shall increase the fierceness of the Fire."*

*(17:97)*

If it is true that they will be made deaf, dumb, and blind, then what is the meaning of other verses where the inhabitants of Hell talk to each other, blaming and reproaching one another for following the other: "When those who were followed disown those who followed them, and they behold the doom, and all their aims collapse with them." "And those who were but followers will say, 'If we had another chance, we would disown them as they have

[150] i.e. 2:198: "and remember Him for He guided you when before you were of the misguided"

disowned us.' Thus will Allah show them their own deeds as anguish for them. And they will never get out from the Fire."[151]

Would that I knew how the previous verse can call them blind, dumb, and deaf! Yet they have sharper vision, a more eloquent tongue, and keener hearing than you or I. Indeed, despite what they are experiencing of the punishment of Hell and the terrors of the blazing fire, they are able to see the people of Paradise and what they are experiencing of bliss and ask them, in clear Arabic language, to give them some of the water or food that God has provided them with: "And the people of Hell will call out to the people of Paradise to 'Pour down to us water, or anything that Allah has provided for your sustenance.' They will say: 'Allah has forbidden them to the disbelievers.'" (7:50)

They will also confess to their sins and call upon God to return them to life on Earth so that they can be good—but in vain:

*"The Fire will burn their faces so that they are grimacing in agony."*

*"Were not My revelations recited unto you, but you denied them?"*

*"They will say,'Oh, Lord! Our misfortune overwhelmed us, and we became a people astray!'"*

*"Oh, Lord! Bring us out of this: if ever we go back to disbelief, then surely we are wrong-doers!"*

*"He will say: 'Get back in it, and don't talk to me!'"*

*(23:104-108)*

This is just a few of the many verses that show they are no less able to see, speak, and hear as we are. You can see that, according to the Qur'ān itself, they remain in Hell with all their senses and consciousness, not losing any of it at all. So where does this leave the claim that they will be made blind, dumb, and deaf?

Believe it or not, Allah took the Children of Israel out of Egypt, and also made them inherit Egypt and its bounties and treasures:

*"We sent revelation to Moses, saying: 'Take away My slaves by night, for ye will be pursued.'"*

*"So Pharaoh sent heralds to the Cities,"*

*"(Saying),'These (Israelites) are but a small band,'"*

*"And most surely they have angered us."*

[151] (2:166-167) "And they will never get out from the Fire"—It's worth pointing out that this also contradicts the verse quoted earlier suggesting they will get out from the Fire!

*"But we are a multitude amply fore-warned."*

*"Thus did We take them out from gardens and watersprings,"*

*"And Treasures, and every kind of honourable position,"*

*"Thus it was, and We made the Children of Israel inherit it."*

*(26:52-59)*

I have no comment, for not commenting is more eloquent in this case.

*"Surely We have sent you with the truth as a bearer of good news and a warner, and there is no people/nation (أمة) but a warner has gone among them."*

*(35:24)*

But this verse contradicts:

*"If We willed, We could have sent a warner to every village (قرية)."*

*(25:51)*

The words "People/Nation" (أمة), "Town" (مدينة), and "Village" (قرية) have the same meaning in the Qur'ān. They mean a sedentary group that resides in a particular place where it seeks its living and sustenance. In fact, they are also applied to transient groups that are non-sedentary: "And when he came to the water of Midian, he found there a group (أمة) of men getting some water." (28:23) They also have other meanings in the Qur'ān that do not concern us here.

Would you like more contradictions of the Qur'ān? Below is a contradiction related to the story of Yunus. Did Allah cast him onto the shore, or did He not cast him? The Qur'ān has two contradictory views on the matter: one confirming it, and one negating it:

*"Indeed, Jonah was one of the messengers,"*

*"When he ran away to a ship completely laden,"*

*"And then drew lots and was of those who are rejected."*

*"And the fish swallowed him while he was blameworthy,"*

*"Had he not been one of those who glorify (Allah)"*

*"He would certainly have remained inside the Fish till the Day of Resurrection."*

*"So We cast him onto the shore, while he was sick."*

*(37:139-145)*

*So Allah cast him onto the shore, then--no! He didn't cast him onto it!*

*"So wait with patience for the Command of thy Lord, and be not like the Companion of the Fish, when he cried out in despair."*

*"Had it not been that favour from his Lord had reached him, he would indeed have been cast off onto the shore in disgrace."*

*(68:48-49)*

So, there you have it! Allah's favour reached him, and if it had not, then He would have cast him onto the shore!

When Allah chose Moses for his revelation after he left Madyan with his people, he was called to prophethood while at the blessed valley of Tuwa, where he saw a fire burning that did not burn out. So Allah ordered him to go to Pharaoh with his signs in the hope that he may be warned and fear God. Moses had no choice but to respond to the order of his Lord. But he complained that his tongue was tied and that he couldn't speak clearly, and he asked Allah to cure him of it, and to open his breast and make his affairs easy. Allah responded to his prayer:

*"Go thou to Pharaoh, for he has indeed transgressed all bounds."*

*"(Moses) said: 'O, my Lord! Expand me my breast,"*

*ease my task for me,*

*and remove the impediment from my speech,*

*so they may understand what I say."*

*"(Allah) said: 'Granted is thy prayer, O Moses!'"*

*(20:24-28 , 36)*

Did Allah really grant his prayer, or was he in the same state as before?

It appears from the text that Allah granted his prayer immediately, since he said straightaway, "(Allah) said, 'Granted is thy prayer, O Moses!'"

But this verse contradicts another verse that shows that Moses, despite his request being ostensibly granted, was still suffering difficulty in speaking that prevented him from clarity, and Pharaoh found it difficult to understand what he was saying:

*"And Pharaoh proclaimed among his people, saying, 'O, my people! Does not the dominion of Egypt belong to me, (witness) these streams flowing underneath my (palace)? What! See ye not, then?*

*Am I not better than this (Moses), who is a contemptible wretch, and can scarcely express himself clearly?'"*

*(43:52)*

So he was still unable to express himself with clarity. He could not clearly or properly articulate in a way that was essential to make plain his intentions and the purpose of his mission to Pharaoh. So was Moses' prayer really granted or not?

The Day of Judgement is the day of the greatest panic. It is the day of unbelievable anguish and terror! On that day: "The guilty will be known by their markings and will be seized by their forelocks and their feet." (55:41)

Let's ignore the fact that "seized" should be in the plural (it should be يؤخذون and not يؤخذ ), since it refers to "the guilty (المجرمون)," a plural noun, but instead ask, "Were they seized like that without being asked any questions? Is the fact that these people are known by their marks enough to pronounce judgment upon them?" The matter is a little confusing for me, because in the Qur'ān are verses that stipulate they will be asked questions, while others contradict that. For that reason, I am confused and am unable to come to an unequivocal view on the matter.

*"So, by your Lord, we will most certainly question them all about that which they used to do!"*
*(15:92)*

*"By Allah, they will most certainly be questioned about that which they fabricated."*
*(16:56)*

*"If Allah had willed, He could have made you as one nation, but He misguides who He wants and guides who He wants, and you will most certainly be questioned about what you used to do."*
*(16:93)*

*"And indeed it is a reminder for you and your people, and soon shall they be questioned."*
*(43:44)*

But this categorical confirmation that they will be questioned turns into negation in other verses where those in question are shoved into Hell without questions or trial, relying instead on the fact that they are known by their markings. This knowledge, so it appears, is not in need of questions and answers, or, in other words, a fair trial! Such a thing would not enter our weak human minds, but it appears that the angels are experts, entrusted and well-versed in knowing the signs of people, and they are deserving of complete trust in such things. If not, then Allah would not have given them free reign to act independently. So there is no need to hold a trial, as they have complications that never end. And if Allah thought that there was any injustice in that towards His servants, He wouldn't have allowed it. Have you forgotten His saying, Most High is He: "and your Lord will not deal unjustly with anyone?" (18:49) Allah is far above doing that!

Remember, my beautiful, when I created you as a drop

And don't forget my fashioning your figure within

So entrust to me your affair and know that

I make my own rules and do what I like.

(Pious poetry)

For that reason, don't be afraid of the verses that negate the claim that people will be asked questions about what they did: "And the sinners will not be asked about their sins" (28:78); "When the heavens are split and become rosy red...On that day neither man nor jinn will be questioned of his sin." (55:37-39)

I cannot conclude my discussion about contradictions of the Qur'ān without mentioning a contradiction that is better described as "the contradiction of contradictions." The strange thing is that the Qur'ān presents this contradiction as a witness and proof of the absolute power of Allah, saying: "This is the way/method of Allah that has happened before, and you shall never find any change in the way/method of Allah," (33:62) and, "So do they not see... you will never find any change to the way/method of Allah, and you will never find any alteration to the way of Allah." (35:43)

These verses contain two contradictions. An ordinary one that happens a lot, and a glaring one I call "the contradiction of contradictions." As for the ordinary contradiction, it is that these verses come in a narrative about the people who came in early times, and describes how Allah sent down punishment upon the transgressors. But if the way/method of Allah with the people was to take swift retribution on them, or at least send down punishment upon them in this life, then why did He only do that in the past? Why is it that the transgressors who came after them—

those who live in the full light of history, especially in this day and age when we can verify such events—live their lives immune from such instant retribution? Nay, they go around freely; perfectly happy and blissful!

So if Allah actually means what He says in the Qur'ān, then why did He stop doing things in this way/method when it came to the age of recorded history, limiting himself instead to verbal threats? Or is this just sloppy speech that means everything and nothing in the well-known Arabic style that the Qur'ān has burdened us with and sunk its roots into? If not, then what is the particle "never/will not" (لن) in the previous verse referring to? "You will never find any change to the way/method of Allah." So how did this way/method change from what it was in the past, despite this word "never/will not," which negates any change in the future?

Some might say, "Don't you see incurable diseases that the transgressors suffer from today, as well as severe crises and calamities, the likes of which have never been seen?" Yes, I see that, but it doesn't afflict all the transgressors; on the contrary, it afflicts only a minority of them. Many of the transgressors who do face such troubles are wealthy and able to endure it and alleviate the full force of it upon them, while those who can't are still only a tiny minority compared to the vast numbers of transgressors. That is the first problem. The second problem is that it doesn't strike only the transgressors, as per the previous method of Allah. It strikes everyone indiscriminately: those who obey Allah and His prophet, as well as those who transgress against them.[152]

In that case, the pleasure or anger of Allah has nothing to do with the calamities that afflict transgressors or the obedient followers. Not to mention that Allah appears to have double standards: one standard for the past, and one for the present, even though all the verses of the Qur'ān confirm that Allah's standard is always the same.

All this comes under the heading of the usual sort of contradiction, if such an expression can be used. On the other hand, there is what I call "the contradiction of contradictions." Here is the big calamity. For the proof of Ibrahim's prophethood was the fact he was not burnt by the fire the polytheists lit for him. The proof of the prophethood of Jesus was bringing the dead to life. If we throw combustible material on fire, what is the way/method of Allah? Is it to burn or not burn? If a person dies, what is the way/method of Allah? Does the doctor bring him back to life, or does he stand there, hands tied? So the miracles given as proof in the Qur'ān cannot, in fact, be true, according to the text of the Qur'ān, itself! "There is no change to the edicts of Allah." (10:64) So there can be no change to the laws of combustion that Ibrahim was excluded from, just as there can be no change to the laws of death that Jesus was excluded from.

Have you forgotten the previous verses that support this? "Never will you find any change to the way/method of Allah," and, "never will you find any adjustment to the way/method of Allah," and all other similar verses? And that these two miracles (the lack of burning and bringing dead to life) only happened in the past, and nothing like that happens now? So how can it be taken seriously when the past is like the present as water is to water, as ibn Khaldun said?[153] Nay, we must treat it with the utmost caution, for that which is based upon lies is, itself, a lie, as is well-known.

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[152] It could even be argued that such calamities afflict the believers in Islam the most!
[153] Al-Muqaddimah (The Prolegomena) 1/220.

*The Qur'ān and Science:*

One can't talk about the negative aspects of the Qur'ān without mentioning its glaring scientific errors that make one's eyes pop out.

The image of the universe in the Qur'ān is that of ancient cosmology popular during the declining periods of Greek science and philosophy, mixed with an eastern flavour and vivid mystic visions. Thus, the earth is the centre of the universe and its stable base above which are seven heavens; each level is above the other and held up by invisible pillars. The Qur'ān appears to have no idea about a limitless universe that is full of galaxies, nebulae, black holes and cosmic dust. The universe of the Qur'ān is closed, lonely and limited, lit up by the sun during the day, and by the moon, planets and stars—the dangling chandeliers that adorn the lower heaven—by night.

This heaven (or heavens) will be torn asunder on the Day of Judgment "for it will be on that day frail, and the angels will be on its sides, and eight will, that Day, bear the Throne of thy Lord above them." (69: 17-18) It appears that the throne is in the seventh heaven, but when heaven splits, eight angels will have to take on the responsibility of carrying it. I don't know whether the number (eight) is true, or whether it's used at the end of the verse because it suits the rhyme, for indeed, graphic outward appearance—if that's the right expression—has an overpowering enchanting effect in the Qur'ān. In fact, it is one of the priorities for the sake of which meaning is sacrificed!

Fire was considered one of the four elements in Greek philosophy and in many ancient eastern philosophies, which had its own independent property, just like water, air and earth. Likewise, light was also regarded as an element by some. So whereas Allah created man from earth, He created the devil, jinn and shaytans from fire, and created the angles from light. Indeed, Allah Himself is made from light, or, rather, He is light; in fact He is the Light of lights. "Allah is the light of the heavens and Earth." (24:35)

It appears that, from time to time, a divine meeting is held somewhere on the fringes of Earth, perhaps near the moon's orbit. Attending it is Sayyiduna Jibreel, peace be upon him, and in particular Sayyiduna Azrael, peace be upon him, and some of the angels designated to matters concerning Earth, in order to confer with each other on the affairs of humans, their livelihood, their worship and the extent of their commitment to the dictates of their religion, as well as who will be created this year and who will die, who goes to heaven, and who deserves torture.

However, it seems the security at these meetings is not as tight as it should be, because it's possible to give the guards the slip and attend the sessions. So the shayaateen sneak in to these gatherings to find out what's going on in them and then inform the people of Earth of it. It also seems that they are able to steal some of the information, and this is what the Qur'ān calls "khatfah" (a snatch).

*"We have indeed adorned the lowest heaven with an adornment: the stars. And as a guard against every rebellious shaytaan, so they cannot listen to the Exalted Assembly, but are pelted from every side, driven off and for them is a perpetual torment. Except one who snatches a snatch and so is pursued by a piercing flame."*

*(37:6-10)*

This meaning is repeated in another verse: "And, verily, We have set mansions in the heaven, and beautified it for beholders. And guarded it from every outcast shaytaan. Save him who steals a hearing, and so is pursued by a clear flame." (15:16-18)

This a lesson for us on Earth, because no matter how rigorous the intelligence services are, they will always fall short, even if they were intelligence services made in heaven!

These two verses seem to have no clue about meteors as is scientifically known. They are just a piece of fire intended for chasing devils away, casting them out and pursuing them—but not burning them, because the shayaateen are not affected by fire since they are made of fire!

These spying missions on the heavenly meetings were ongoing without interruption, but it seems that they stopped completely when the prophet was sent (peace be upon him) for, indeed, the shayaateen were surprised one day (saying):

*"We pried into the secrets of Heaven, but found it filled with strong guards and flaming meteors. We used, indeed, to sit there in (hidden) places, to (steal) a hearing; but any who listen now will find a flaming fire waiting in ambush for him. And we know not whether harm is intended to those on Earth, or whether their Lord intends guidance for them."*

*(72: 8-10)*

All of that was after sending the prophet. No more spying after today. Now the security is completely water-tight after previously having been somewhat lax. So whoever tries to listen from now on will be repelled by meteors from every side. Spying after today will be very difficult, if not impossible—at least according to the previous verse.[154]

*"And (remember) Lot, behold, he said to his people: 'Ye do commit lewdness, such as no people in Creation (ever) committed before you.'" (29:28)*

Is this true? That homosexuality was purely the invention of the people of Lot? In fact, homosexuality is one of the oldest forms of sexual gratification—preceding humanity itself. It springs from the sexual instinct shared by human and animals alike. It is widespread amongst many types of animals and even insects. So how can the Qur'ān completely deny this fact about humanity before Lot? It is a mistake I thought the Qur'ān would be above making.

Another scientific error that the Qur'ān makes is its misunderstanding of 'dead/barren land,' jumping from it to human death in order to prove the power of God over bringing the dead back to life, just as he brings life to the earth after its death by sending down rain upon it:

*"And among His signs is that you see the earth barren, but when We send down on it water, it stirs and swells. Most surely, He who gives it life is the giver of life to the dead; surely He has power over all things." (41:39)*

This verse contains a substantial scientific error that is difficult to perceive at first glance. It is the primitive and naïve conflation of metaphorical death and actual death. Mixing the two is either an intentional error or gross ignorance; there is no middle way. Barren ground is dead only in a metaphorical sense, but as for the death of a human being when his heart and brain cease to function, it is actual death from which there is no escape.

I wonder how God in the Qur'ān could consider one as synonymous with the other and treat them as the same thing? It is the height of absurdity. God isn't the only one who can bring life to earth after its death. Actually,

[154]This important event that coincided with the birth of the prophet – peace be upon him - reminds me of another event that is no less important, namely the Christmas star that accompanied the birth of Jesus and led them to where his mother gave birth. It seems the births of important people is always accompanied by important events!

you and I can also bring life to it without having to be gods. Its death is nothing more than a metaphorical death that shares nothing with actual death—apart from the name.

There are a variety of micro-organisms in the soil that help take nitrogen from the air and pass it into the earth so that dormant vegetation is able to take what it needs. In this way, the soil is protected to ensure its fertility and maintain the carbon and nitrogen cycles. So the earth, in this case, is alive—active and dynamic, and not dead. Despite this, the Qur'ān attributes literal death to it so it can use it as the premise on which to build its argument, even though it doesn't support the argument in any way at all!

A conclusion built on a false premise, is false, no matter what. That is a basic rule of logic. One can't blame the polytheists—these rebellious, arrogant minds that the Qur'ān heaps all sorts of abuse on—for rejecting that which doesn't make sense to them. So their reward is to be berated, denigrated, vilified and called all sorts of names. "Allah has sealed their hearts and hearing, and over their eyes is a veil." (2:7) For that reason, they are "Deaf, dumb, and blind so they do not understand." (2:171)

Muslims say "Sadaqa Allahu al-Atheem" to these verses and take them very seriously, using them and similar verses as the premise for schools of thought on free will, predestination, and free choice. And they make very genuine and sober attempts to reconcile this maelstrom and pull it together. But it never occurred to any of them that these epithets are not intended to reflect an actual state, but, rather, to express fury and rage at those dissenters, those deniers—may the curse of God be upon them all!

So let us return to what we were talking about: that whatever credit goes to God is not for bringing the earth to life after its death, but for reviving it from its dormant state. And it is a reviving that you and I are no less able to do than He is (Most High is He). As for actual death, neither you nor I—nay! Not even He—can do anything about it!

*"The number of months in the sight of Allah is twelve. Ordained by Him on the day He created the heavens and the earth. Of them, four are sacred, that is the right religion."*

*(9:36)*

Earth! How blessed are you! You are the focal point of the universe; you are its center and its foundation. God's whole attention is focused on you. The configurations of the cosmos and the measures of time are all for your sake! There is no time, apart from your time. No place, apart from your place, and no firm foundation other than yours. Indeed, the months are your months, and the years are your years, and existence itself has been fashioned because of you. Had it not been for the special care and attention your Lord has bestowed upon you over and above the rest of the universe, and had it not been for the fact you are the very heart of the vast cosmos, He would not have made your humans, His khalifah, nor fashioned them from your surface.

And how blessed is man, who has been cared for ever since his existence on this earth by the watchful eye of the Merciful, who never neglects him for a moment and never sleeps. So rejoice and be jubilant, O, Master of the Universe! You are in a safe haven and a fortified fortress that nothing can breach, even if the whole world was to rally against you until the Day of Judgment. And whenever you see anything to the contrary, then it is just your flawed senses and the deceptions of Iblis, the cursed one. For, indeed, God has spoken the truth, and your brother's belly lies, so do not be of the disputers!

*"Allah is He Who raised the skies/heavens without any pillars that you can see, then He mounted the Throne and He made the sun and the moon subservient. Each one runs its course for a term appointed. He regulates affairs, making clear the signs that you may be certain of meeting your Lord."*

*(13:2)*

There was a time when I (and many others) used to think that the sky was the roof of the world, and that above this roof were six other roofs, layered one above the other. That is what I learnt at home, and in the Qur'ān, and mosque, and street, and all those I would meet and gather with from amongst the old, young, and infirm in the district. This traditional view of the sky was one of those generally-accepted religious truths that the Qur'ān, hadith, and sayings of the pious predecessors conveyed.

But after reading about modern astronomy in a magazine in the first instance, and then in books in libraries at the time, I didn't find any evidence of this view of the sky. Others did the same as me, and thus the old myths began to fade and disappear from academic circles—but not from religious circles, whether Islamic, Christian, or circles of other religions that claimed the sky was of this nature. They still attempted to reconcile modern astronomy with their religious texts, as the ignorant masses cling to their favorite superstitions.

With regard to Muslims, this view (of the sky/heaven) is revived every year with the story of "Al-Isra' wal-Mi'raj" and the prophet's ascension from one heaven to the one above it, in the company of Gabriel (peace be upon him).

After travelling by night to Jerusalem on the back of "al-Buraq"[155] and meeting all the prophets, he prayed two 'rak'ats,' then he was taken up to the lowest heaven/sky. Gabriel was then asked, "Who are you?" He replied: "Gabriel." Then it was said: "And who is with you?" He said: "Muhammad." It was said: "Has he been sent for?" He said: "He has been sent for." So the door was opened for them, and lo! he saw Adam, who welcomed him and made Du'a for him to be well. Then he was taken up to the second heaven.

Gabriel was then questioned, and it was said to him: "Who are you?" He replied: "Gabriel." Then it was said: "And who is with you?" He said: "Muhammad." It was said: "Has he been sent for?" He said: "He has been sent for." So the door was opened for them. And lo! he saw the two cousins, John and Jesus, who welcomed him and made Du'a for him to be well.

Thus it continued until they reached the seventh heaven. He met, on the way, Joseph in the third, Enoch in the fourth, Aaron in the fifth, Moses in the sixth, and Abraham in the seventh, leaning on al-Bayt al-Ma'mur (Allah's House), which 70,000 angels enter every day, and never return from(which implies that a new batch of 70,000 comes each day)!

Then, Gabriel took him to "Sidrat al-Muntaha" (The Lote Tree of the Utmost Boundary), whose leaves were like the ears of elephants, and which had fruit like large earthenware pitchers. But when it was covered by the order of

[155] A creature that the prophet rode on the night of al-Mi'raj. It could place its hooves at the farthest boundary of its gaze.

God, it changed so that no one can describe its beauty. Then God revealed to his servant what he revealed. This amazing image still looms large in my mind, even though I left it behind decades ago. As for the ignorant masses, they lap up every word of this story as they listen to it recounted every year on 27th of Rajab.

One of the strange things in this story is that none of the 40 or more angels in charge of the doors of heaven had heard of Prophet Muhammad, despite the fact that, on the day of his birth, Heaven was full powerful guards and meteors, and everywhere reverberated with his mention. They were all eagerly anticipating his arrival for a long time. But it appears the news of his mission didn't reach everyone!

This is the view of the sky in the Qur'ān, no matter how hard the scholars of the Qur'ān and hadith try to revise the meaning to make it more rational and plausible to suit the modern age:

The sky/heaven in the Qur'ān has seven layers: "Have they not seen that Allah created seven heavens, one above another" (71:15)

And the sky/heaven has been built, and is a building: "And the sky/heaven We have built with might, and it is We who make the vast extent." (51:47) "And He who made the earth a couch and the sky a building/canopy" (2:22)

And the sky/heaven is a roof that is protected from shayateen: "And We have made the sky/heaven a roof well-guarded." (21: 32)

And from it (the sky/heaven), missiles are launched at the shayateen: "And We have adorned the lowest heaven with Lamps, and We have made them missiles to drive away the devils." (67:5)

And the sky/heaven will be rolled up like one rolls up scrolls of paper: "The Day that We roll up the heavens like a scroll for writings." (21:104)

And the heavens/sky can be sought and get full: "We had sought the sky/heaven, but had found it full of strong guards and meteors/flaming stars." (72:8)

And the sky/heaven can be split and cracked open like any solid material that has been made or manufactured: "And the sky/heaven on that Day shall be rent asunder, for it will, on that day, be frail." (37:55)

And the sky/heaven has roads and paths: "By the Sky/Heaven with its numerous paths" (51:7)

And the sky is decorated with lamps: "He ordained them seven heavens in two days, and assigned to each heaven its duty, and We decorated the lower heaven/sky with lamps and guards" (41:12)

And the sky will be stripped off its place, like skin stripped off a sheep: "And when the sky/heaven is torn off" (81:11)

And near the end of the world, the sky/heaven will move in a violent, circular motion: "On the Day the sky/heaven will sway with circular motion." (52:9) "On the day the earth will be changed to a different earth, and so will be the heavens/skies" (14:48)

In preparation of a new creation: "As We began the first creation, We shall repeat it—a binding promise." (21:104)

And the heaven/sky has doors that open and lock according to requirements: "And the heaven/sky shall be opened, for they shall be doors." (78:19)

And the heaven/sky, like any building, is built upon pillars, but these pillars are invisible: "Allah it is who raised the heavens/skies without pillars you can see." (13:2)

And the heavens/skies are seven strong, solid entities: "And We built above you seven strong ones" (78:12)

And they are layered one upon another in perfect beauty and harmony: "He who has created the seven heavens in layers. You shall not see any flaw in the creation of the Merciful. Look again, can you see any faults?" (67:3)

This is a summary of the image of the sky/heaven in the Qur'ān. So where is this image in relation to what the modern science of astronomy teaches us? It is an ancient mythological image that stems from the popular religious imagination and esoteric spiritual visions of the time, while the modern scientific image stems from telescopes, astronomical observatories, space probes, satellites and rovers. Despite this, the leading modern Qur'ānic scholars seek to reconcile the two images so that they can make the ancient image read like the modern image and so that they can reveal in the Qur'ān all the achievements and advances that modern astronomy has made in recent years.

The Theory of Relativity can be found in the Qur'ān, and Atomic Theory was first discovered by the Qur'ān, and Quantum Mechanics was taken from the Qur'ān, and I don't know, but I think black holes were alluded to by the Qur'ān. But where is the sky of the Qur'ān in all of this? There is nothing in the science of modern astronomy about roofs, or doors, or scrolls, or strips, or layers, or pillars, and no evidence in it about that holy number, seven!

Perhaps one of the most bizarre of these claims is the theory of the "Expanding Universe," which modern scholars have discovered in the Qur'ān, and who infer this from His saying: "And the sky/heaven We have built with might, and it is We who make the vast extent." (51:47)

They make a great song and dance about this verse being the definitive proof for the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān. It might be possible to read this verse in a way that agrees with this modern theory, if only the Qur'ān had any semblance of a scientific tone that would permit such a reading. If only the view of the sky presented in the Qur'ān was a scientific, enlightened, dynamic, open, and infinite view of the cosmos. In other words, if only it wasn't a rigid, mythical, dark, and deathly quiet image.

But it is as we have seen, so I cannot but read this verse in the same way as the classical scholars did in their sheltered religious environment awash with myths, supernatural events, and mysticism. For that reason, it doesn't deviate from its linguistic meaning. So they (the classical scholars) said "Innaa Moosi'oon" means, "Indeed, We are able.' It is said, "Awsa'a al-Rajul" meaning He possesses means, ability, and power. The verse is saying that We (Allah) have the means, power, and ability to make it vast and wide. That is all the verse meant according to the linguistic meaning at the time.

Furthermore, what reason lies behind specifying seven heavens, other than because it was regarded as a sacred number in ancient mythology? Wherever you look in this universe, you will not find evidence of this number, except in the minds of fortunetellers, sorcerers, mystics, oracles, gnostics, and such people who claim to have secret knowledge. How can this number be reconciled with the colossal numbers of planets, stars, star systems, galaxies, nebulae, and cosmic dust?

Where is this number, seven, in this avalanche? Where are the seven heavens and seven earths? And what is the meaning of the lowest heaven and the lamps that dangle from it? Are they the relatively modest number of stars that are observable with the naked eye? No, before all of that, can the lowest heaven (as the Qur'ān calls it) even be regarded as a single, unified, homogenous entity? Is it merely our galaxy, the Milky Way, which is made up of millions of stars sprinkled in the night sky? Or are there other galaxies beyond this galaxy, and galaxies beyond them counted in millions, each one containing millions of stars?

It is naïve to label this explosive and clashing mixture, these worlds which words cannot describe, nor eloquence define, nor numbers compute, the "Lowest Sky," and limit it in the way these verses do: "Blessed is He who made constellations in the skies/heavens, and placed therein a Lamp and a Moon giving light" (25:61) "And He it is who made the stars for you, that you may be guided by them in the darkness of the land and the sea. We have detailed our revelations for a people who have knowledge." (6:97)

*"They ask you about Thul-Qarnain. Say: I shall recite to you some of his story. Lo! We made him strong in the land and granted him means of access to every thing.*

*So he followed a road until when he reached the setting of the sun, he found it set in a muddy spring. Near it he found a People: We said: 'Thul-Qarnain! Either punish or show them kindness.'*

*He said: 'Whoever doth wrong, him shall we punish; then shall he be sent back to his Lord who will punish him with awful punishment!*

*But whoever believes, and works righteousness, good will be his reward, and we shall speak unto him a mild command.'*

*Then followed he (another) road, until when he reached the land of the rising sun, he found it rising on a people to whom We had given no shelter from It. (He left them) as they were: We completely understood what was before him."*

*Then followed he (another) road, until, when he reached (a place) between the two mountains, he found, beneath them, a people who could hardly understand a word.*

*"They said, 'Thul-Qarnain! surely Gog and Magog make mischief in the land. Shall we then pay you a tribute in order that you should raise a barrier between us and them?'*

*He said: That in which my Lord has established me is better (than your tribute). Do but help me with strength (of men), I will set between you and them a strong barrier.*

*Bring me blocks of iron,' until when he had filled up the space between the two mountain sides, he said: 'Blow,' until when he had made it (as) fire, he said, 'Bring me molten brass which I may pour over it.'*

*So they were not able to scale it, nor could they make a hole in it. He said: 'This is a mercy from my Lord: But when the promise of my Lord comes to pass, He will make it into dust; and the promise of my Lord is true.'"*

*(18:83-98)*

We are still circulating within this ancient, narrow, mythological worldview in which it isn't difficult for a traveller to reach the place where the sun sets in the west and the east. In the west, it sets in a spring of muddy water (Hama' means black moist mud). Then, it disappears to where only God knows, until it rises from the east on the

other side of the earth. Indeed, Thul-Qarnain reached the east and the west as though these are actual fixed points on the globe.

On his return, Thul-Qarnain passed by an unknown region. Despite this, the Qur'ān uses the definite article "the" when talking about it. This region suffers a great deal from the mischief of Gog and Magog. For that reason, its people implore him to make between them an impregnable barrier that would turn away their evil. So he does, and Gog and Magog cannot climb over it due to its great height—and not just that, but they can't pierce through it, due to its density and thickness. And that will be the case until the Day of Judgment!

The Qur'ān commentators are in great confusion about the matter of this barrier. They use all sorts of far-fetched myths to explain it, even though there is no place or region on planet Earth that has not been discovered. For, indeed, the slogan, "God has spoken the truth, and your brother's belly lies" is still their standard, and God will one day reveal where it is and destroy it as he promised, near the end of time. For Thul-Qarnain is real, and the muddy spring in the west is real, and Gog and Magog are real, and the barrier is real, all of it is real and true, so don't dispute with the truth, for the truth deserves to be followed. And who is the best deserving to follow the truth than the Ummah of Muhammad, who God blessed with the true religion?

These verses are more than just a legend that the Qur'ān erroneously regards as an actual historical event (Gog and Magog and Thul-Qarnain—and even his name of "the two-horned one" has a mythological tone to it), or places the Qur'ān erroneously regards as geographical (such as the barrier of God and Magog). Just as these verses are more than just acts that contradict known facts (reaching the point of the rising or setting sun) at a time that lacked good transport or communication (and not to mention that these characters, places, and events are shrouded in vagueness typical of a time of legend). These verses are more than all that, for legends in the Qur'ān are to be regarded as true knowledge, as long as the Qur'ān revealed it!

What a narrow universe the Qur'ān portrays! How small the sky would be if it were confined to the sky of the Qur'ān! Not to mention if the sun, moon, and stars were confined to the "Lowest Sky," lit up by lamps. As for the other six skies/heavens, they are not lit up! But, then again, angels, who dwell amongst the highest assembly, have no need for light because they are made of light! Just as Allah Himself is light—nay, He is the Light of lights!

And it appears that, with this light, He lit up the prophets when Muhammad met them during the ascension to the heavens, going from heaven to heaven in the company of Gabriel, so that he could enjoy the blessing of meeting his Lord and receive His revelation: "Then he approached and came down, Till he was at a distance of two bow-lengths or (even) nearer; And He (Allah) revealed to His servant what He revealed. The heart did not lie in what it saw. Will you then dispute with him concerning what he saw?" (53:8-12)

Ignore the laws of nature, leap-frog over how the cosmos actually works. The answer to everything is "by the absolute will of God." This is the way of the Qur'ān.

Those tasked with giving religious rulings are in a bit of a fluster these days, for although the space age doesn't concern them, since all the discoveries made by the unbelievers are simply pernicious works of the devil, since they never mention Jinn who try to snatch information, nor shooting-flames that Allah sends to chase them away, news has reached them that the moon is a sphere, similar to Earth, which astronauts are endeavoring to prepare for human habitation. If this is true, then those responsible for giving fatwas and applying shari'ah law will have their

hands full trying to deal with the religious issues that arise when the lunar city becomes packed with residents, including some Muslims, upon whom will fall the obligation of performing their religious duties, such as prayer, fasting and Hajj.

The question that baffles our venerable scholars will be: what is the correct way for these lunar Muslims to identify the beginning of the blessed month of Ramadan when they are on the surface of the moon, seeing that sighting the new moon is the basis for identifying its beginning?

But no sooner do these esteemed scholars find one solution—perhaps by saying that, in this case, Earth takes the place of the moon, and should be sighted in the last lunar day of Sha'ban—than another problem crops up. Namely, the problem of pilgrimage to the Holy House for one who can manage it. Should they return to Earth to perform this duty? Though Allah does not task a soul beyond that which it can bear?[156]

So should they then perform it on the moon? Never mind the problem related to sighting the new moon, how will they do Tawaf when there is no Ka'ba to go around? How will they perform the Sa'y between Safa and Marwa? Where will they throw the stones? Will they still be able to hit Shaytan from the moon? And have you forgotten the black stone and gaining blessings by touching and kissing it? And what about visiting al-Medina al-Munawira?

And how should we solve the problem of the Qiblah when there is no Ka'bah on the moon for the lunar Muslims to face towards at prayer times? Some of them seek to solve this by using as evidence the words of God Most High: "He has chosen you and has not laid upon you any hardship in religion," (22:78) and also His saying: "To Allah belongs the East and the West, so wherever you turn, there is the face of God." (2:115)

Another vexing problem is what to do with those Muslims who die on the moon and are buried there. The Qur'ān talks about raising the dead from graves on Earth, not graves on the moon! So what will become of these poor souls? Will they be deprived of the delights of paradise and the Houris and young boys of perpetual youth? Who will remember to take them back to Earth when the Day of Judgment comes, seeing as "Every man that day will be gripped by his own distress, making him heedless (of others)?" (80:37)

May God curse those western astronomers! They have placed our venerable religious scholars in a very difficult position that we could have done without. For if life on the surface of the moon is of no benefit to those who don't believe in resurrection or rising from the dead, it is certainly of no benefit at all to the Believers. For that reason, the religious scholars don't recommend going to the moon or ever living there. Nay, some have even said it is haram to go there, even just for tourism.

For who can guarantee they will return, when fate is in the hand of God?! They may even die on the way there between Earth and the moon, and their bodies will disintegrate and dissipate and mingle with the cosmic dust, and there will be nothing left. That is, unless strict divine orders are issued to prepare a crack squad of angels tasked with seeking for Muslims lost in outer space. Oh, how they could do without this ominous voyage! Indeed, they will lose themselves, and lose "…this life and the next, and that is the great loss." (22:11)

Thus, the Qur'ān commits many scientific errors that were considered facts at the time, and which the Qur'ān simply hijacked wholesale and inserted into its Muhkam (clear/decisive) verses. Then came modern science and exposed their flaws. Had they discovered these flaws at the time, they would not have held back in trying to explain

[156] See: 2:286, 6:152, 7:42, 23:62, 65:7

them away by giving them meanings other than what the text actually says. But today, these mistakes are so clear that even our "scholars" dare not contradict them.

There are other verses that our "scholars" are very attached to because they appear to indicate modern scientific discoveries, such as: "He wraps the night around the day, and wraps the day around the night," (39:5) which they claim it is an allusion to a spherical Earth (because the verb كَوَّرَ means to wrap or wind around something, such as a turban around the head). However, one can wrap an object of any shape. Also, there is no point when night or day is wrapped around the earth. At all times, only half the earth's surface experiences night, while the other half experiences day. However, this image of wrapping night and day around the earth equates precisely with view of ancient cosmology, where the sun, moon, and stars rotate around a flat Earth. From the point of view of someone on the surface of Earth, it seems that night and day are being wrapped around the Earth. But, in actual fact, it is the earth that is rotating, both on its axis and in an orbit around the sun, and this is what causes night and day.

Another favored verse, which we mentioned previously, is: "And the sky/heaven We have built with might, and it is We who make the vast extent," (51:47) which they claim alludes to the theory of the "Expanding Universe," and which they make an enormous fanfare about, even though all the evidence shows that they are either ignorant or dishonest.

Thus, where the Qur'ān lacks eloquence, they make it eloquent. Where it is unclear, they clarify it. Where it is illogical, they endow it with logic. Where reason rejects it, they force it to accept, and where they find contradictions they remedy them. Where they find errors, they correct them. Where there is defect, they smooth it away. Even to the point that, where there is no meaning, they give it a thousand meanings to rescue it. Thus, it is indeed true that the Qur'ān's eloquence, miraculous nature, logic, and reason is actually from them, and not the Qur'ān.

Our professor, the late Dr. Zaki Naguib Mahmoud, related a story about St. Thomas Aquinas, the first Christian philosopher in Europe during the Middle Ages, when he was a monk in the monastery with other monks. Now, Thomas was an innocent and trusting man to the extent that some thought he was simple-minded. One day, his colleagues stood next to the window, and one of them called him while pretending to be astonished, "Come here Thomas! Look at the sky, and see these flying cows!" So Thomas rushed to look, and as he did, his colleagues burst out laughing and mocking him. Then, Thomas turned to them with a serious face and said, "Who are you mocking? For it is easier for me to believe cows can fly than believe Monks would lie!"[157]

Such is the case of the Qur'ānic commentators. It is easier for them to believe that the universe and all it contains of objects and events is in error than to believe that the Qur'ān is in error. One of the "intelligent" believers told me once: "The Qur'ān is not a book of science, so why do you burden it with that which it cannot bear?" I replied: "That is true. But it is also true that it should not make mistakes in that which it has no knowledge. For either it should speak the truth about what it knows and what it doesn't, or it should remain silent! Furthermore, why then do you use the Qur'ān as evidence of its veracity when it concurs with science? Yet, when it contradicts science, you say it is not a book of science? This is nothing but the height of sophistry!"

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[157] "On the Philosophy of Criticism" by Zaki Naguib Mahmoud. P. 135.

*Everything in the Qur'ān is from Allah:*

There is no law of nature in the Qur'ān. The will of Allah is the law. There aren't even any rules governing the universe, for they are all Allah's rules and not the universe's. Allah in the Qur'ān doesn't recognize rules governing the universe, and, as a result of this, life and death, success and failure, health and sickness, victory and defeat are not the result of man's efforts, but come from Allah, who created man.

This means that good deeds and bad deeds, obedience and disobedience, good works or evil ones…they are the Qur'ānic alternative for natural law. God only has to be pleased with someone or be angry with him to set the wheels of fate in motion, either for him or against him—never mind any natural laws.

So Allah is the one who cures, not the doctor. And Allah is the one who makes people sick, not germs. He is the one who raises and debases, who saves and destroys, gives life and takes it away, and in His hand is good and evil, and He has power over all things.

"Don't they see how many a generation We destroyed before them, whom We had established in the earth as We have not established you, and We sent the clouds pouring rain on them in abundance, and We made the rivers to flow beneath them, then We destroyed them on account of their sins and raised up after them another generation." (6:6)

It is not long journeys or wars that can cause a man to die: "O, you who believe! be not like those who disbelieve and say of their brethren when they travel in the earth or engage in fighting: had they been with us, they would not have died and they would not have been slain.' So Allah makes this to be an intense regret in their hearts; it is Allah who gives life and causes death and Allah sees what you do." (3:156)

The thing that causes destruction and ruin is people doing bad things. Nothing else. "Your Lord would not wrongfully destroy communities of people if its members were doing good." (11:117)

Is that true? Can a sane person say such a thing? For there cannot be any place in the world that does not have both good and bad people. Will these people be destroyed on account of what those have done? Natural phenomena do not discriminate between good and bad people. Is Allah the same? In fact, morality, values, obedience and disobedience has no effect on natural events, but the Qur'ān seeks to force us to believe that they do.

"Do those who plot evil feel secure that Allah will not cause the earth to swallow them up, or that the punishment will not come upon them from whence they do not perceive?" (16:45) What a lot of threats pour, unrestrained, from of every page of the Qur'ān. They are intended to show that Allah, and not nature's laws, is the One who administers all events in this world. He alone is the absolute agent in it. He is the absolute ruling power (القهار) above over His servants.

And what better evidence of the lack of seriousness of these threats than the fact that what is threatened may happen or it may not, and in both cases this seems to be decided at random:"And when We took a promise from you and lifted the mountain over you. Take hold of that which We have given you with firmness, and bear in mind what is in it, so that you may guard (against evil). But you turned back thereafter. Had it not been for the Grace and Mercy of Allah to you, you would certainly have been among the losers." (2:63-64)

God makes a threat (to crush them under the mountain if they do not abide by their covenant) then He backtracks on it. Why didn't He carry through the threat? Why this fake benevolence? God's favour upon them? Have they deserved this benevolence when, in fact, God says He has cursed them and made them into monkeys and pigs?

Show me an earthquake, disease, or epidemic that only afflicts the wrongdoers. In fact, many times, it seems to afflict the innocent before anyone. Especially in the Third World, which is teeming with poor people who are sick, maimed, or with children who are like ghosts, their eyes sunken and ribs showing. I wonder if these wretched people are the ones the Qur'ān is talking about when it says Allah afflicts the wrongdoers? Are they the ones He is threatening with divine punishment to pile affliction upon affliction?!

Disasters and afflictions have natural causes and laws, but the Qur'ān, as always, ignores this, and instead substitutes them with the laws of disbelief and faith and makes them the cause. Furthermore, these laws seemed to be applied according to whim and inconsistently, and this is where these divine threats lose their seriousness and meaning and become empty.

It is often said that the Qur'ān is not a science book; on the contrary, it is a religious book of guidance aimed at awakening zeal and stirring the emotions. It is a book of exhortations and parables imparting moral lessons of the past. This is true, as long as the Qur'ānic commentators and scholars of Kalam stick to this principle each time they come across an obstacle of this nature. One of the conditions of parables and moral lessons is that they must have some basis in observable reality so as to make them valid. If not, then they are nonsense and have no value. Are the parables and moral lessons in the Qur'ān really free from such contradictions with observable reality? For, indeed, that which is based on falsehood is false—even if it was written in a thousand-and-one Qur'āns.

*"And Allah sets forth a parable: (Consider) a town safe and secure to which its means of subsistence come in abundance from every quarter; but it became ungrateful to Allah's favors, therefore Allah made it to taste the utmost degree of hunger and fear because of what they wrought."*

*(16:112)*

Here, we see faith and disbelief given as the reasons for which humanity either prospers or suffers, and not because of abundance or lack of natural resources, climatic conditions, and so on. Does this moral lesson really tie in with observable reality?

*"The reckoning draws near for mankind, while they turn away in heedlessness… none of those communities that We destroyed before believed, so will now these people believe?… Then We made Our promise good to them, so We delivered them and those whom We pleased, and We destroyed the wrongdoers."*

*(21:1-9)*

Sink holes are a result of the evil that humans commit, and not geological reasons. God in the Qur'ān will not allow even the mention of natural causes. Look what befell the powerful, rich man, Qarun, because he dared to say his wealth was amassed due to his own efforts and knowledge of how to make a profit:

*"Qarun was of the people of Moses, but he acted insolently towards them, even though We had given him such great treasures that even its keys would be too heavy for a company of strong men. His people said to him: 'Exult not, for Allah does not love those who exult (in*

*riches)… and do good (to others) as Allah has done good to you, and do not seek to make mischief in the land…' He said: 'I have been given this only on account of the knowledge I have'… So We caused the earth to swallow him up and his house. Then he had no one to help him against Allah, nor could he help himself."*

*(26:76-78)*

Here, Allah causes the earth to swallow up just one man and his house, as it appears that he was the only one deserving of punishment. Especially after saying: "I have been given this because of my knowledge," for this is a blatant insolence to Allah that He cannot accept, even though there are many people today who are richer than Qarun, and more insolent, arrogant, and obstinate, although the Earth doesn't swallow them up.

In what follows, Allah will make the earth quake and destroy a whole nation of people because they denied their prophet, without any consideration for natural factors to do with the geology of the land. So after destroying the people of Lot by sending a shower of stones as hard as baked clay because of their debauchery, He sent Shu'ayb to Madyan:

*"And to Madyan (We sent) their brother Shu'aib. He said: 'O, my people! serve Allah, and fear the Last Day: do not commit evil on the earth with intent to do mischief.' But they rejected him, so a dreadful quake overtook them, and by morning they were bodies lying in their dwellings."*

*(29:36-37)*

Dams are protected through piety to God. Nothing holds them other than the Most Merciful One. But when the promise of our Lord comes, He will make them dust, without any consideration for the factors to do with structure, engineering, or topography of the land where these dams are sited. This is an important lesson for all those residents who live near dams. If they aren't pious and god-fearing, then they will have no one to blame but themselves when the dam bursts, for he who has been warned has no excuse. And one of these dams is the Marib Dam[158] in Yemen:

*"Certainly there was a sign for Saba in their abode, two gardens on the right and the left. Eat of the sustenance of your Lord and give thanks to Him. A good land and a Forgiving Lord! But they turned away (from Allah), and We sent against them the Flood (released) from the dams, and in place of their two gardens We gave to them two gardens yielding bitter fruit and (growing) tamarisk and a few lote-trees. This We requited them with because they disbelieved; and We only punish the ungrateful rejecters."*

*(34:15-17)*

Intimidation and threats in the Qur'ān never cease; they are like a flood that has burst its banks. This next threat is aimed at the whole of mankind, not just one group or nation:

*"O, men! you are the ones who are in need of Allah, while Allah needs nothing, the Praised One. If He so pleased, He could get rid of you and bring a new creation. That is not difficult for Allah."*

*(35:15-17)*

[158] The Marib Dam was breached and repaired more than once between the time is was first built around 1750 BC to the final time it was breached and left unrepaired in 570 or 575 AD

This contempt and denigration of humanity is a feature of the Qur'ān. However, if it is really true that man needs Allah, then why did He choose him alone to be His deputy (Khalifah) on Earth and entrust him with such important duties that no-one else can do? Why is He constantly finding fault with him and with his disobedience and rebellious nature, when rebelling and disobedience are among the characteristics of one who is not in need? "And certainly We have explained for men in this Qur'ān every kind of similitude, but most men just arrogantly refuse everything except ungrateful denial." (17:89)

And among the god-given characteristics of man is his argumentative, contentious nature: "Does man not man see that We created him from a small drop? Yet lo! he is an open disputant." (36:77)

And it is man's nature to turn away proudly from the good and blessings bestowed upon him: "Yet, when We bestow Our favours on man, he turns away and behaves proudly." (17:83)

So we see that rebellion, contention, turning away, refusal, disbelief, being put in charge and managing affairs are the characteristics of one who is not in need rather than one who is in need. Even though we see the believers declaring their need for God and confirming it every morning and night in their prayers, this actually proves nothing other than man's attachment to religious delusions, and how they affect the mind of men. How can it not be a delusion when what we observe is that success and failure, comfort and disaster do not discriminate between believer or disbeliever? And how can it not be a delusion when we see humanity's achievements built with its own blood, sweat, and tears, while the heavens do not lift a finger? By my life, this is nothing but a massive delusion—nay, it is the greatest of all delusions!

Furthermore, if man is truly in need of God, then why does He, Most High, desert him when disasters strike? Abandon him to his fate, suffering untold anguish and misery? Dying from starvation like rats, dogs, and pigs? Where is the evidence of His saying: "(Allah), who answers the distressed when he calls on Him, and who relieves his suffering." (27:62)

What "answer" is He talking about here? Whose suffering did He relieve? When? Did He answer the prayer of the mother whose child writhed and cried with hunger pains before he died in her arms? Did He answer the prayers of the countless innocents that suffer and die daily all 'round the world—especially in Muslim countries? Or did He not hear their prayers? Where is the truth of His saying (Glory be to Him): "And there is no creature on the earth but on Allah is the sustenance of it," (11:6) when we see it is a dog-eat-dog world, where the strong take with violence and the weak starve, while the Giver of Sustenance does not stir from His throne.

Promises, threats, rhetoric, intimidation, legends, and myths that don't stand up to criticism…this is the Qur'ān. "If He so pleased, He could get rid of you and bring a new creation." Just like that—simple! But only *if* He so pleased, and He doesn't so please, and won't—ever! What a lot times "if" is used in the Qur'ān. Enough of the Qur'ān's intimidation!

The student of the Qur'ān who reads it, not in a devotional, parroting way, but with a critical eye, examining it carefully, will soon see that this Qur'ān is a unique oratory phenomenon that has no likeness, except in the speeches the greatest demagogues of history—though that is not to deny that it contains excellent passages and beautiful nuances. The one who studies it in this way, and focuses on the verses we described previously as the "masterpieces," will not fail to notice the enormous effort that the Qur'ān expends in choosing its words and embellishing them using all manner of devices of beauty, grandeur, splendor, and rhythm. He will be mesmerised by the melodic purity which tugs at the heart strings, and this captivating eloquence which is a joy to behold, even in the verses that mean nothing.

But this same student will also feel a strong clash, like thunder in front of some of the other verses, which fall below this high standard. He will be astonished at their inconsistency, disjointedness, and fragmentation, as well as the redundant dressing and affectation similar to "adherence where it's not required,"[159] as Abu Ala' al-Ma'arri puts it.

And he will also be astounded if he is a person who combines both linguistic appreciation with a truly scientific approach, undistorted by faith. A scientific approach that doesn't differentiate between mistakes in "holy" books, and mistakes found in any other source. And I say truly scientific approach because there are innumerable "men of science" from amongst Muslims, Christians, Jews, and others, who measure things using two standards.

The first measure is that of the believer who closes his eyes and accepts every poor expression, overblown adjective, nonsensical sentence, and blatant scientific mistake in these books. In such cases, they defer the matter to Allah and trust that He has a wisdom and explanation that is beyond their human ability to comprehend. Or they employ all sorts of far-fetched interpretations to cover it up and hide its defects. Then there is the measure of the purely objective man of science, who does not compromise or make concessions, and who weighs matters impartially and fairly. He does not hide from the truth, even if it is something he does not want to face. He weighs the mistake according the same criteria, regardless of its source.

This is the essential difference between the man of science who selectively applies it, and the man of science who refuses to settle for anything other than the truth, who abides by it even when it is against himself. Are they the same?[160]

In summary, the disjointed and weak parts in the Qur'ān, which clash with the healthy and sound ear because they fall far short of even the most basic requirements of consistency and harmony and flow, fall silently and peacefully upon the ears of the faithful, whose linguistic sense has been dulled. He can't distinguish the bad from the good, or the eloquent from the gibberish. He can only regain his ability to distinguish between them if he makes an enormous effort and struggle to do so.

It is not true that the Qur'ān is on one level of excellence, perfection, and elegance. It contains the "wheat and the chaff," and what lies between the two. It contains flaws and imperfections that will surprise the one who examines it carefully and is not afraid to say the truth. It also contains exquisite beauty and glittering pearls that no one can deny apart from the most stubborn. Thus, the scene in the Qur'ān is confused and without clarity.

Despite this, they want us to believe of the Qur'ān: "Had it come from anyone other than Allah, they would have found many discrepancies." (4:86) As if that verse itself is not enough to prove that it is of human origin! That it is not free from errors and flaws, nor blights nor defects. It is just like any human endeavor; it is a mix of good and bad. It is excellent and flawed, and, as a result, it is possible to make something worse than it and better than it, as we have seen in previous sections.

And this does not contradict the Qur'ān when it said no-one can bring the likes of it, because that is true and precise, and has nothing to do with whether someone can do something better than it. For masterpieces have their own woven texture and unique identity that it is not possible to make an exact likeness of. It is, however, possible to make something better than it. This is even the case with the verses that are "masterpieces" in the Qur'ān.

How far! How far is that which you are promised![161]

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[159] Abu Ala' al-Ma'arri the famous Syrian Arab poet wrote about what he called "adherence where it's not required" which is when a poet takes it upon himself to use letters and vowels in the rhyme which are unnecessary, but is done to enhance the musicality of the rhythm and display his linguistic skills.
[160] "Are they equal?" The author is parodying the Qur'ānic refrain that appears in two places in the Qur'ān: 11:24 & 39:29
[161] Reference to Qur'ān 23:36. The author is alluding to the fact that the challenge in the Qur'ān is an impossible one and therefore meaningless.

❖

*Verses that Have no Meaning:*

In the Qur'ān, there are a significant number of verses that have no meaning, even though, as usual, the mufassirun are able to bring about wonders with their waffling and prattling and defence of the meaningless, producing one eloquent meaning after another! They are motivated by the ideology of justifying anything and everything in the Qur'ān to the extent that the crooked verses become pearls of wisdom, fonts of knowledge, the source of eloquence, and the template for good style which man cannot attain.

*"By those ranged in ranks.*

*Then those who drive away with reproof.*

*And those who recite a reminder.*

*Lo! Your Lord is surely One."*
*(37:1-4)*

What do the first three verses mean? Nay, these three riddles? And what do they have to do with the oneness of God? Did you understand anything? I challenge man and jinn to understand these verses—bearing in mind Jinn know Arabic as we saw in the previous section. And by reading Surah al-Jinn, it is clear that amongst the Jinn are masters of eloquence and good style—not to mention their knowledge of the secrets of the unseen, which they are more proficient in than us!

What shall I say? Even the mufassirun themselves couldn't understand anything. But these poor souls are obliged by the nature of their profession to understand everything. Yes, these verses must have some meaning. At the very least, the meaning attached to them in language, just like any words that people speak. But the meaning is trivial and not worthy of being used as an oath by God to His servants.

Of course, the mufassirun will not accept that God would swear by things that have no value, so they assume that behind these verses are profound wisdoms and deep meanings that befit Him, Most High is He. So they, with their soaring imagination—nay, with their myth-making imagination—and armed with strong, unshakable faith that these verses, these riddles, have sublime meanings, great significance, and lofty ends that our limited understanding cannot comprehend nor our human intellect fathom…and how can it when it is revelation from the All-Wise, the All-Knowing? So they ponder, evaluate, scrutinize, and examine these verses closely. But, despite this, they cannot arrive at a solution. So, in this case, they must resort to the religious traditions, legends, exegetical techniques, and the sayings of the pious!

Thus, "those ranged in ranks" are angels who arrange themselves into rows for worship, or their wings in the air, waiting to be commanded with a task. Likewise, "those who drive away" are also angels who drive along the clouds. As for "those who recite," they are either the angels again, or it means people who recite the Qur'ān, and the use of the feminine (التاليات) is for an elided word such as "group" (جماعة). Or, perhaps there is a subtle wisdom, or a Qur'ānic miracle that we haven't yet discovered!

I don't deny that repeating refrains, the use of poetic rhyme, alliteration, Saj' (rhymed prose) and such like are techniques that greatly aid memorization, as it makes it easier to recite accurately without mistakes. All of this is true on the condition that this speech has a meaning. But if it has no meaning, then it is just the doggerel of soothsayers who, themselves, also were just as eager as the Qur'ān to fix their orations into the memories of their audience, whether it had meaning or not.

Meaningful literature—oral or written—contributes to raising cultural, educational, historical and social awareness, whether in a significant or a minor way. But if it has no meaning, then this is the biggest calamity[162] and the disaster of disasters. So what awareness have these verses—these riddles—contributed to raising?

Furthermore, these verses begin with "Waw" (و), which is the Jurative "Waw" (for swearing an oath), so even if these verses had a meaning that is beyond our weak and feeble minds, how then can Allah swear by something that is unknown? The use of the Jurative "Waw" is where one swears by something that is known to its audience in order to confirm something else. In what way do these three verses, whose meaning is unknown, confirm the "Oneness" of Allah (as stated in the 4th verse)? Or do they actually detract from God's oneness? Is its meaning weakened by their omission?

*"By the mountain*
*And a book inscribed*
*In parchment spread open*
*And the frequented house*
*And the raised roof*
*And the swollen sea*
*Most surely the punishment of your Lord will come to pass."*
*(52:1-7)*

This is also similar to the saj' of the soothsayers, even though it is not completely free from meaning, but then again, who said the saj' of the soothsayers has no meaning? In any case, these opening verses are simply cryptic jibber-jabber and inscrutable babble. If you were to remove them, it wouldn't affect the following verses at all. On the contrary, it might improve their effectiveness and clarity. However, the words "the frequented house" stirred the imagination of the Mufassirun, with their love of myths and legends, and they explain that it is a heavenly house in the sixth or seventh heaven (some say there is one in each heaven), and it is in line with the Ka'ba[163] on Earth, and is a

[162] Reference to the vocabulary used in the Qur'ān 39:34
[163] Notice the very precise scientific description.

heavenly place of pilgrimage visited by 70,000 angels every day who make Tawaf (circumambulation) and pray and never return.[164]

*"By the wind sent forth in gusts.*

*By the raging storms,*

*And that which scatters around,*

*Then separate them one from another,*

*Then cast a message,*

*To excuse or to warn,*

*Surely that which you are threatened, will come to pass".*

*(77:1-7)*

Here is another dose of the dramatic utterances of the soothsayers, which, if it was omitted, would not change a thing. It is the sort of vacuous dressing and word-play that one would have thought would be below the creator of the universe to indulge in. Also, it is well-known that the thing one makes an oath by should be of enormous significance so as to make the oath meaningful. So how can Allah swear an oath by something that is mundane? However, it seems that Allah has saved this is the sort of prattle, due to a wisdom known only to Himself, for a select group of the short Suras that appear at the end of the Qur'ān.

*"By those who tear out, drowningly*

*By those who activate, actively*

*And by those who swim along, swimmingly*

*Then those who race ahead, racingly,*

*Then those who regulate the affair,*

*The Day when the quaking will quake,*

*Following it another…"*

*(79:1-7)*

[164] Tafseer Jilalayn p.523.

This is one of the most amazing pieces of soothsayers' Saj' in the Qur'ān, because it is just a stream of euphonious words purely for the sake of it. They neither add benefit nor dispel harm. They do not increase awareness nor remove corruption. Just jibber-jabber! A collection bombastic prattle that would have been much better off left out. Of course, all the hadith about these verses revolve around angels. Allah swears by them because of their importance in His sight. So "those who tear out violently" are the angels tearing out the souls of the unbelievers. As for the very odd use of the word "Gharqan" (غرقا= drowning), which I am unable to see its place here, apparently means "violently!" Who knows? Perhaps it has a miraculous, rhetorical purpose that is beyond my limited mind to appreciate—and everyone else's, too. No?

Just as "those who tear out violently" are a specific type of angel (ones who tear out the souls of unbelievers) the "Nashitaat" (ناشطات, which literally means active, lively, energised) are another type of angel, whose job it is to reinvigorate (تنشيط) the souls of the believers, because staying up for tahajjud and fasting and praying and worship has exhausted them, so God sent them special angels from His seventh heaven to reinvigorate them and dispel fatigue so that sluggishness doesn't overwhelm them. Perhaps the meaning also includes, as the tafseer of al-Jalayn says, drawing out the souls of the believers gently so that they don't suffer the pain of death, and can quickly join The Highest Companion.

The third type of angel, "those who swim along swimmingly," are called "the swimmers" because they swim through the heavens carrying out God's commands (Most High is He). As for the "racers," they are racing to Paradise, and for that task there is also a specific type of angel. But it is not just a random or haphazard race like those on Earth—no! Everything there (in the heavens) is run in a systematic and disciplined way. You see, the believers are not all on the same level of faith; some are more deserving of entering paradise before others, and so their right should not be lost in the severe congestion, and no one should infringe on anyone else (and those with the strongest faith will also have the greatest shyness, as shyness is part of faith, and they would allow those with little faith to push their way in front of them as they don't want to cause bottlenecks at the door to Paradise). So, because of all that, and because "Allah is not shy of the truth" (33:53) and "Truth is most deserving of being followed," especially on the Day of Judgment when neither money nor sons will avail anyone, Allah created "Those who race ahead, racingly," and they are the angels who will race ahead with the souls of the believers, taking them to Paradise quickly so as to avoid being stuck in long queues.

As for the Mudabiraat, they are the angels who manage the affairs of Earth, meaning they descend with the orders of how earthly affairs will be managed and dealt with.

*"By the Sky and the night-visitor,*

*And what will make you know what the night-visitor is?*

*The piercing star,*

*There is no soul but has a protector over it…"*

*(86:1-4)*

In this next piece of Qur'ānic Saj', the Mufassirun haven't attempted to insert the heavenly angels into it, though not due to any favour or restrained on their or the angels' part, for, indeed, they always resort and hasten to them whenever they need saving in times of adversity, but because the verses don't suit it. So the "night visitor" here is not an angel, but a star. But which star? The "Piercing star." Fine. But all the stars are piercing, because they all pierce through the dark of night with their light. So the opinion of most of them is that it is the cluster known as Pleiades, which is the cluster most obvious to the naked eye in the night sky. But the problem is that Pleiades is not one single star—it is a group of stars. Others have said it is any star of piercing brightness. So what is the result of all this? Nothing!

These verses are meaningless mumbo-jumbo that you or I could have written. But to say it comes from an All-Mighty God—that is what I cannot grasp. This, despite the prophet saying, "Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, then let him say something good or remain silent." As for whether this puerile wordplay is a miracle that "neither man nor Jinn can bring the like of, and they won't ever bring the like of," that is just an insult to intelligence and an affront to human achievement at a time when mankind is knocking at the doors of the heavens themselves! But what can be done with the Qur'ān, which is full of verses that declare that no human has ever—nay, *will* ever—reach its level of excellence?

"There is no soul but has a protector over it." This is the concluding clause of the opening invocations. The protectors are the angels. Yes! We return to the subject of angels, and how sweet is the return to the symphony of angels for he who has waited patiently for the angels. Here they are, raising their heads again. Indeed, the faces of the mufassirun light up with joy. Good news for you today!

At least the oaths in the previous verses, whether long or short, are accompanied by a concluding clause, because many times in the Qur'ān there are verses which have no concluding clause to their oaths. For example, the verse in the next section, though, of course, the concluding clause is present in the imagination of the Mufassirun, those guardians of the ideology of justification and patching-up. The ideology of filling the gaps and plastering over the flaws.

*"Saad: By the Qur'ān, possessing honour/remembrance.*

*Nay but the unbelievers are in pride and schism."*

*(38:1-2)*

The problem with this verse is not confined to the fact that these oaths have no concluding clause, but here we have one of those chapters that being with meaningless letters of the alphabet. Al-Suyuti says: "God knows best what He means by this." No doubt He does, because we don't. So we must simply say: "Its knowledge is with my Lord. My Lord does not go astray nor forget," (20:51) and move on.

*"Qaaf: By the Glorious Qur'ān*

*Nay, but they marvel that there has come to them a warner from among themselves. So the Unbelievers say: 'This is a strange thing!'"*

*(50:1-2)*

Here is another of these meaningless letters, though in this case the Mufassirum have suggested some meanings. Some have said that Qaaf is a special name of Allah. In some circles of Thikr (remembrance of Allah) the faithful call on Him using this secret name of Qaaf in the hope that their prayers will be given special access to the All-Hearing, who is sometimes hard-of-hearing. Others say that Qaaf is a mountain that surrounds the earth. Others say that it means, "matters have been decided!" Alas, would that matters were decided! I think we should follow al-Suyuti's advice and place it in the box marked: "Only God Himself knows what He means."

These verses also lack a concluding clause to the oath, though, of course, the Mufassirun are full of ideas as to what it could be and suggested several verses that, although they lack the correct grammatical structure for the concluding clause of an oath, one must assume the intention of a concluding clause is there. So, for example, al-Qurtubi says it could be, "We know that which the earth takes…" (50:4) Or it could be: "Indeed, therein is a reminder!" (50:37) Or it could be: "Not a word does he utter…" (50:18) Or it could be: "Nay, but they marvel…" (50:2) While al-Akhfash (a famous grammarian) said: "The concluding clause has been elided/omitted and should be understood as: 'I swear by the glorious Qur'ān, you will be raised up from the dead!'" Take your pick from these—it makes no difference.

*"By the break of dawn*

*And ten nights,*

*And the even and the odd,*

*And the night when it departs.*

*Is there (not) in that, an oath for those who possess understanding?"*

*(89:1-4)*

What is the meaning of Allah swearing by even and odd? What are the 10 nights? Well, they are the first 10 nights of Thul-Hijjah, the month of the pilgrimage, where the day of Arafah is on the 9th day and the 10th day is Eid-al-Adha, the Eid of the sacrifice. But do the first 10 nights of Thul-Hijjah really have such a great importance that Allah should swear by them and send Qur'ānic revelation about them? Yes! They have such great importance, and more! At least they do in the domed, sealed universe of the Qur'ān. In this geocentric universe, God's only concern is with prayer, fasting, the rituals of Hajj, worship, Ghusl, periods, Istibra', and such like.

But where is the concluding clause to these oaths? Yet again, Allah has left it out for a wisdom known only to Him. Is Allah incapable of composing concluding clauses? What is one to think? Is leaving it out a special form of eloquence? Did it achieve something that putting it in would not have achieved? What is that? I feel truly sorry for those Qur'ānic scholars who had to spend their lives defending the Qur'ān and extracting profound wisdoms from this linguistic hodgepodge. For it contains glittering gems that no-one can see apart from these masters of waffle.

Look again at the very parochial, sealed, and limited character of these verses. "The ten nights," the cosmic wedding nights! For the 10th of Thil-Hijja is a global—nay, *celestial*—occasion, and not a local matter, and, likewise, the break of dawn is the break of dawn all across the universe, and not just confined to different areas of the earth at different times as the earth rotates and orbits the sun. Eid al-Adha is a cosmic celebration. The angels celebrate it in the presence of the prophets throughout the heavens. In the same way odd and even appears to limit numbers to integers. This small, domed universe of the Qur'ān—where it is all shrouded by the dark of the night with nothing but the moon and stars until they set on one side and the dawn sun slowly rises on the other side, lighting up the whole universe—is simply the image presented by the geocentric, ancient cosmology current in that area of the world at the time.

There is no daybreak but the daybreak that takes place on Earth at the centre of the universe, and Hajj to Allah's holy house and the universal Eid that is celebrated, not just down here but up there in the highest assembly. And let us not forget about what we said previously in Sura al-Tur, that the holy Ka'bah enjoys an important strategic position in the scheme of the universe, since it falls directly below the Bayt al-Ma'mur (The Oft-Frequented House), which the scholars differ slightly about where it is. Some say in the third heaven, some say in the sixth, while others say it is in the seventh heaven. Although the Mufassirun (God's pleasure be upon them) differ about which heaven it is in, they don't differ about it being precisely above the Ka'bah. Thank God this is not a matter of dispute; this is His blessing to us, Most High is He.

Finally, it is very strange that the Qur'ān then asks this rhetorical question: "Is there (not) in that an oath for those who possess understanding?" As though everything in these verses is as clear as day!

*"Nay! I swear by this city.*

*And you are a freeman of this city*

*And the begetter and whom he begot.*

*Verily, We have created man into toil and struggle."*

*(90:1-4)*

Here in front of us it is written, "I don't swear by this city," but apparently it means, "I do swear by this city." What a strange thing is this oath? The scholars say the negative particle (لا) here is redundant, but they don't explain why it is redundant, or what eloquent wisdom lies behind placing a redundant particle of negation in a sentence where the meaning is the opposite of negation. Could it be that this is a scribal error and that it should not have been written as لا but as لَ , which is the "Laam of emphasis" (لام التأكيد)? Of course not. The Qur'ān is free from error. It is infallible. No, this is just a redundant particle that we have yet to identify the wisdom behind.

Next, there is no need for this oath, because the thing it is confirming doesn't need confirming! No one is unaware that human life on this planet is full of struggle, hardship, and toil. It is obvious that the priority is to preserve the rhyme, regardless of the lack of meaning. The only thing that each final word requires is the presence of a letter "d" (د) at the end so that the flow of the soothsayers' saj' is not interfered with. In this Sura, and in every oath in

the previous verses, rhyme takes precedence over meaning. The meaning after that can be as it may, weak or strong; the important thing is the saj' and the rhyme, and that's all!

"And you are a freeman of this city." The Mufassirun say this is parenthetically inserted between the oaths, meaning Muhammad can do as he pleases in the usually forbidden sanctuary of Mecca, and so can fight the unbelievers. If that is the meaning, then it is a little odd, as this is a Meccan Sura, and Muhammad wasn't in any position to fight the unbelievers at that time. Others say it means Muhammad is an inhabitant of this city. But is someone who lives in a city in need of a divine revelation to tell him so? Next, Allah swears by a begetter. What begetter? Some say it means all begetters. Others say it means Adam. In the next line is it, "He who can't beget," or "whom he begot," with the ما meaning من. More importantly, is this miraculous speech?

*"By the night as it shrouds*

*By the day as it shines*

*And the creating of male and female*

*Indeed, your striving is diverse."*

*(92:1-4)*

This is a momentous revelation that the Qur'ān has divulged in these four verses. It must be, otherwise they wouldn't have been deserving of Allah making an oath. Do you know what is this momentous revelation that was hidden from all mankind until He informed us of it in the Qur'ān? "Indeed, your striving is diverse." What a stunning revelation! What astounding information! The secret of secrets has been disclosed. I wonder, is this anything other than just the saj' of soothsayers? If not, then what is it?

*"By the runners breathing pantingly,*

*Then strike sparks of fire,*

*Then those that make raids in the morning,*

*Then thereby raise dust,*

*Then rush thereby upon an assembly:*

*Most surely man is ungrateful to his Lord."*

*(100:1-6)*

Perhaps the level of inane oration has not reached the level that it has here in these six verses. They are the best example of the hollow and empty soothsayers' saj' in the Qur'ān. Even horses running on a raiding expedition do not escape an oath. If this indicates anything, then it indicates the trite and trivial nature of the oaths, as well as an insult to man, to whom the oath is addressed. The oaths have been so overused and trivialised to the extent that they have no value at all. I cannot believe in God if all this babble is His speech. Better that He didn't speak! Speech betrays its author. Either it kindles his fire, or it increases his dimness. So if the speech is meaningless waffle, then what does that say about its author?

❖

*The Rhymed Prose of the Qur'ān and the Soothsayers:*

The Qur'ān is truly a unique book with its own individual composition. It is prose, but it's not like regular prose. It is poetry, but not in the style of the pre-Islamic poets. It has meter, but it doesn't conform to standard meters. It is rhymed, but not like the structured rhymes of Qasidas. It is itself. It is the Qur'ān, and that's all.

The Qur'ān is in love with rhyme and besotted by Saj' to the extent that it sometimes resembles the Saj' of the soothsayers. But not all the rhymes and saj' that one finds in its clear-and-not-so-clear-verses are the same. There are some that tug at the heartstrings, some where the heart is unmoved, and some that the heart dislikes. This is dependent on the position and role the rhyme plays in the particular verse, and whether it is well-structured and elegant. Whether each word befits its position in relation to the words next to it, as well as the meaning? Or do the words jar phonetically with the tone of the piece? Do they clash with each other? Are they out of place? Is there disharmony as a result of a musicality or voice that doesn't suit the words? Do the words suit it?

The Meccan Suras are mostly rhymed, unlike the Medinan ones, which are mostly prose with the exception of short ones. This is because when Muhammad first began uttering verses of the Qur'ān in Mecca, they were usually in a terse, rhymed saj' full of evocative and enigmatic language aimed at attracting attention by creating a sense of mystery and marvel, just as soothsayers have done through the ages. Then, when he moved to Medina, the style changed to one of a more steady prose, better suited to conveying rules, codes, moral principles, and stories of past nations. Muslim scholars relate that Saj' was mainly used by soothsayers, oracles, and clairvoyants. But the true and correct picture of Saj', and the abbreviated letters, and its various stylistic techniques, is that it's just as evident in the Qur'ān as elsewhere. This is why the polytheists accused Muhammad, amongst many other things, of being a soothsayer, because what he was reciting (particularly in these earlier verses) were in the Saj' style, such as Sura al-Qamar and al-Rahman and al-Insan, which are amongst the best examples of Qur'ānic Saj'.

So, for this reason, Muslim scholars were divided about how to deal with the use of Saj' in the Qur'ān. Some of them denied there was any Saj' in the Qur'ān at all. The main proponents of this view were al-Rummani, al-Baqillani, and his teacher, Imam Abu Musa al-Ash'ari, and the rest of the Ash'aris, as well as others. They laid down rules, definitions, and conditions about what constitutes saj' so as to protect the Qur'ān from being accused of containing saj'.

It is startling to see the degree of rigidity, bias, outright denial, and play with words that they go to in order to absolve the Qur'ān of the accusation of containing saj' out of fear that it would be equated with the speech of soothsayers rather than the infallible and miraculous speech of a god. And don't think that these scholars who deny this are just ordinary men. No, they are men of great scholarship and knowledge. They head schools of thought in religious discourse and views. But even they are not able to overcome their confirmation bias. Their servitude to the text has bowed the heads of the mighty! In this case, the great and good are no different from the common man. The wise are no different from the foolish. They are slavishly devoted to the belief that this is divine speech, and so must be defended against all reason. Reason and good judgment is abandoned in order to protect the text. God has spoken the truth, but your brother's stomach lies.

But they are not all of the same view. There is a group whose belief in the Qur'ān is just as strong as the others, but they are more flexible, less conservative, and less literal. For example, (Diya' al-Din) Ibn al-Atheer, in his book, *The Common Ideal/Proverb* (المثل السائر), rejects the view of those who disparage saj', arguing that saj' can be an excellent literary form, and criticises the view of those who refuse to call those passages of the Qur'ān where the letters have harmonic unity saj'. Regarding this, he said: "Some of our colleagues from amongst the masters of literature criticise it (saj'), but I see no reason for this other than their inability to produce the like of it. For, indeed, if it (saj'), as it appears in the Qur'ān, was stylistically weak, then it would have been produced in large quantities (by the unbelievers in response to the Qur'ān's challenge to produce something like it), to the extent that they would have produced Surahs completely in saj', just like Surah al-Rahman and Surah al-Qamar, and others. In fact, on the whole, there is not a Surah that is free from it (saj')." [165]

So, as we see, he considers saj' an excellent literary form, and he accuses those who don't approve of it as lacking the ability to master it. Simply by virtue of it being used by the Qur'ān, there is sufficient evidence that it is above suspicion (of being a weak stylistic form). This is the criterion by which we must measure whether literature is strong or weak, in his opinion. If we were to treat his statement in the way it would be treated under Islamic Law, it would fall under the category of "clear implication," no doubt about it.

As for the Qur'ān monopolising the rules of Arabic grammar (the idea that all the rules of grammar are derived from the Qur'ān), this I can see no reason for. But it is the belief that too often leads the one who holds it to shortsightedness. My view is that saj' is not always a beautiful style, even if it is in the Qur'ān, or in a thousand Qur'āns, as we shall see. Just as the view that speech cannot be eloquent if it is in saj' is not correct. Every style has its place.

In short, those who confirm that the Qur'ān contains saj' use as evidence those passages of the Qur'ān where the articulation of the letters have harmonic unity, while insisting that the saj' of the Qur'ān is superior to human saj'. They define two types of Saj': weak and strong. The weak saj' is that which appears forced, artificial, counterintuitive and trite, in both words and meaning, especially that which is protracted and long-winded. As for the strong saj', it is that which is spontaneous, unforced, elegant, faultless, and free-flowing. This strong saj' appears often in the excellent literature of the Arabs. This is not the saj' of the soothsayers. The soothsayers' saj' is just the most common type. In

[165] As quoted by Muhammad Abu Zahra, in "The Greatest Miracle" p.321.

fact, some of the most eloquent masters of literature from amongst the Arabs have used eloquent saj'. Regarding this, it is related about Abu Talib, the uncle of the prophet, that he said to Saif ibn Thi Yazin: "Allah has made grow for you one whose lineage is pure, whose stock is mighty, whose origin is proven, whose stature is lofty, and whose seed is planted in the most noble land and most excellent mine."[166]

Abu Zahra denies that there is any forced or contrived saj' in the Qur'ān for no reason other than it is in the Qur'ān. As a consequence, its saj' is all of the strong type, and there is none that is weak: "We cannot suppose the possibility of forced or contrived saj' in the Qur'ān at all, because it is from God Most High."[167] This is the measure of excellence. Whatever is from God cannot be forced or contrived. On this, there can be no discussion.

Now, I would like to present you with some clear examples of the Saj' of the soothsayers so that you can judge for yourself how they compare with similar Suras in the Qur'ān—especially those examples we gave in the previous chapter that begin with oaths on trivial matters that do not stir the imagination, nor challenge the senses, nor provoke reflection, nor bring about results, nor increase knowledge, nor foster good taste, nor widen horizons. The most they accomplish is simply rebuking, scolding, warning, and reproach, punctuated by meaningless references or anecdotes hackneyed by repetition, making them banal and trite. Is this anything other than the Saj' of the soothsayers?

This reading of the Qur'ān is one of conscious thought and reflection that opens the mind and frees one's critical abilities, challenging the mind. It is not the reading of the pious worshipper deep in devotional prayer in the mosque. This devotional reading does not foster anything other than blindness, dull senses, and a paralysed mind. As for the reading of real contemplation, it fosters clear vision and insight. It unfogs judgment and aesthetic instinct and guides one to the correct way. That's how I want you to read the Qur'ān and to compare it to the Saj' of the soothsayers. Use your mind, and don't view the Qur'ān as a star-struck lover, blinded by love, who cannot see anything that is going on around him of what is and what was! Look: is it better than the saj' of the soothsayers, or are they both on the same level? Are they, at the very least, similar? But leave those excellent verses of the Qur'ān to one side for now, for they outside this comparison!

The news of the prophet's death had only just broken in Madina when some tribes renounced their allegiance to Muhammad, and so the wars of apostasy (Riddah) started during the reign of Abu Bakr. Some took this opportunity to attack the new religion and make their own claim to prophethood in the hope of gaining the power and prestige that the Quraysh had achieved through the appearance of Islam. From this came the Fitnah (civil strife) of those who claimed prophethood, the most famous of whom was Musaylimah al-Hanafi from al-Yamamah. It's possible he may have been a Christian, since Christianity was the majority religion in the desert regions of al-Yamamah.

These "prophets" imitated the prophet's actions of going into seclusion, covering and cloaking themselves when they claimed they were receiving revelation, just as they also composed their "revelations" in saj' in imitation of the Qur'ān and in the style of the soothsayers during the time of the prophet and before Islam. Most of what has come down to us of these verses of saj' are those of Musaylimah, who decided to make an area in al-Yamamah a Holy Sanctuary (حرما آمنا) where fighting was prohibited, just like the sanctuary of Makkah. He also gave himself a grand name to indicate his high status and lofty position. It was "The Merciful One of al-Yamamah" (رحمان اليمامة) as a way of emphasising the gravity and prestige of his prophethood, and he called the walled area (in al-Yamamah) "The Garden of The Merciful One."

[166] As quoted by Muhammad Abu Zahra, in "The Greatest Miracle" p.322.
[167] Muhammad Abu Zahra, in "The Greatest Miracle" p.320.

Here is some of the saj' that has been related from him[168]:

1.

وَاللَّيْلِ الدَّارِسِ
وَالذِّئْبِ الْهَامِسِ
وَمَا قَطَعَتْ أُسَيْدٌ مِنْ رَطْبٍ وَلَا يَابِسِ

By the night that obliterates (the day).

By the wolf that silently prowls,

The (Banu) Usayid did not cut neither fresh nor dry!

2.

إِنَّ بَنِيْ تَمِيْمٍ قَوْمٌ طُهْرُ لَقَاحِ
لَا مَكْرُوهَ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا إِتَاوَة
نُجَاوِرُهُمْ مَا حَيِيْنَا بِإِحْسَان
نَمْنَعُهُمْ مِنْ كُلِّ إِنْسَان
فَإِذَا مُتْنَا فَأَمْرُهُمْ إِلىٰ الرَّحْمٰن

Indeed, the Banu Tamim are a people of pure lineage,

No harm should befall them nor should they be taxed,

We will dwell side by side in kindness, as long as we live,

And we shall defend them from every person,

But when we die then their affair will be in the hand of The Merciful.

3.

يَا ضِفْدَعُ ابنة ضفدع
نِقِّي مَا تَنِقِّينَ

[168] Muhammad 'Izzat Darwaza, "A History of the Arab People," 7/38-40.

أَعْلَاكِ فِي المَاءِ وَأَسْفَلُكِ فِي الطِّينِ
لَا الشَّارِبَ تَمْنَعِينَ
وَلَا الْمَاءَ تُكَدِّرِينَ

Oh frog, daughter of a frog

Croak as you wish to croak

Your upper part is in the water

While your lower part is in the mud

You cannot prevent the drinker from drinking,

Nor turn the water murky

4.

والمُبذرات زرعًا
والحاصدات حصدًا
والذاريات قمحًا
والخابزات خبزًا
والثاردات ثردًا ،
واللاقمات لقمًا ،
لقد فضلتم على أهل الوبر
وما سبقكم أهل المدر
ريفكم فامنعوه
والمعتر فآووه
والباغي فناوئوه

By those who scatter seed for planting

By those who reap at harvest

By those who winnow wheat

By those who bake the bread

By those who crumble the bread into the broth

By those who take in mouthfuls

You have indeed been favoured above those who dwell in hair (tents)

Nor shall the people of Mudar take precedence over you

So stand forth in defence of your land

And give refuge to the wretched

And resist every unjust oppressor[169]

Khalid ibn Walid offered Tulayha al-Assadi, who claimed prophethood, the opportunity to enter Islam and obedience (to the Khalifah Abu Bakr). But he refused, saying that an angel was visiting him just as he used to visit Muhammad. An intense battle raged that almost broke the back of the Muslims. The leader of the Banu Fazara (who had accepted Tulayha's prophethood and so were defending him against the Muslims), Uyayna, started to come to Tulayha time and again, while he (Tulayha) was wrapped in his cloak in his tent claiming he was waiting for revelation to ask if anything had been revealed from heaven to him yet, hoping that he would give him the good news of victory over the Muslims. On the third occasion, Tulayha said, "Revelation had come down to me," and said:

إِنَّ لَكَ رَحًى كَرَحَاهُ ، وَحَدِيثًا لا تَنْسَاهُ ، وَإِنَّ لَكَ يَوْمًا سَتَلْقَاهُ ، لَيْسَ لَكَ أَوَّلُهُ ، وَلكِنْ لَكَ أُخْرَاهُ

"Indeed, you will have a millstone[170] like his, and you shall have fame that you will not forget. Indeed, you shall have a day (battle) that you will meet him, the first part of which will not be in your favour, but you shall have the last of it."[171]

Another one of those to whom soothsaying and claiming prophethood has been attributed was al-Mukhtar ibn Abu 'Ubayd al-Thaqafi. He was the first of those to espouse the Kaysanites Shia doctrine of the Imamate of Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyya. During that time, he performed some wondrous acts, and al-Baghdadi narrated some of his Saj', which came in a Khutbah he gave to the people at Karbala, and claimed that it had been revealed to him from heaven:

الحَمْدُ لِله الَذِي وَعَدَ وَلِيَّهُ النَّصْرَ , وَعَدُوَّهُ الْخُسْرَ , وَجَعَلَهُمَا إِلَى آخِرِ الدَّهْرِ قَضَاءً مَقْضِيّاً , وَوَعْدًا مَأْتِيّاً

"Praise be to God, who has promised victory to his ally/friend and defeat to his enemy, and made them both matters that are permanently ordained until the end of time, and a pledge that shall always be fulfilled."

After he had completed the conquest of Kufa, al-Jazeera, and the whole of Mesopotamia up to the borders of Armenia, he began to compose verses of saj' like that of soothsayers, including some where he claimed revelation had descended upon him:

أما والذي أنزلَ القرآن ، وبيَّنَ الفرقان ، وشرَع الأديان ، وكره العصيان ، لأقتُلَنَّ البغاةَ مِن أزْد عمان ، ومذحج وهمذان ، ونهدٍ وخولان ، وبكرٍ

[169] 73. Muhammad 'Izzat Darwaza, "A History of the Arab People," 7/40.
[170] Millstone is a common metaphor for war/battle in Arabic poetry.
[171] Ibdem, 7/51

وهزّان ، وثُعلٍ ونبهان ، وعبْسٍ وذبيان ، وقيسٍ وعَيْلان

"By He who revealed the Qur'ān, and clarified the Furqan, and legislated the religions, and despises disobedience, I swear I shall indeed kill the unjust aggressors from Azd 'Oman, and Mathhaj, and Hamdan, and Nahd, and Khawlan, and Bakr, and Hazzan, and Thu'l, and Nabhan, and 'Abs, and Thibyan, and Qais, and 'Aylan."[172]

وحقّ السميع العليم، العليِّ العظيم، العزيز الحكيم، الرحمنِ الرحيم، لأعركَنَّ عرك الأديم، أشرافَ بني تميم

"By the truth of the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing, the Sublime, the Mighty, The Powerful, the Wise, The Beneficent, the Merciful, I will surely bring down the full fury of warfare upon the chiefs of Bani Tamim."[173]

Al-Baghdadi relates that al-Mukhtar was misled by extremist Saba'iyya[174] from amongst the Shia. They told him, "You are the proof/authority (Hujjah) of this time," and they encouraged him to make the declaration of prophethood, so he did so amongst those most close to him and claimed that revelation had descended upon him, and composed saj' after that, saying:

أمّا ومنشئِ السحاب، الشديدِ العقاب، السريعِ الحساب، العزيزِ الوهّاب، القديرِ الغلاّب، لأنبشنَّ قبرَ ابنِ شهاب، المفتري الكذّاب، المجرمِ المرتاب. ثمّ وربِّ العالمين، وربِّ البَلَد الأمين، لأقتُلَنَّ الشاعرَ المهين، وراجزَ المارقين، وأولياءَ الكافرين، وأعوانَ الظالمين، وإخوانَ الشياطين، الذين اجتمعوا على الأباطيل، وتقوّلوا عليَّ الأقاويل. وليس خطابي إلاّ لذوي الأخلاقِ الحميدة، والأفعالِ السديدة، والآراءِ العتيدة، والنفوسِ السعيدة.

"By He who sends rain clouds and is severe in punishment, quick to account, the Mighty, the Bestower, the All-Powerful, the Conqueror. Verily, I shall indeed exhume the grave of ibn Shihab[175], the fabricator, the liar, the criminal, the doubter, then by the Lord of the Worlds and the Lord of the Secure Land (Mecca), I shall surely kill the contemptible poet, bard of the rogues, friends of the unbelievers, champions of the oppressors, brothers of the Devils, who conspire against the heroes and who put words in my mouth. My speech is not for anyone but those of blessed character, and righteous deeds, and venerable opinions, and happy souls."[176]

He then gave a speech, in which he said:

الحمدُ للّه الذي جعلني بصيراً، ونوّر قلبي تنويراً. واللّهِ لأحرقَنّ بالمصر دُوراً، ولأنبشَنَّ بها قبوراً، ولأَشفِيَنَّ منها صدوراً. وكفى باللّه هادياً ونصيراً

"Praise be to God, who has endowed me with insight/knowledge, and has shone light into my heart so that it is lit up. By God, indeed I shall surely burn down the houses in Egypt, and I shall disinter the graves there, and by that I shall indeed cure the chests/hearts of their rage (for revenge), and sufficient is God as a guide and a helper."[177]

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[172] Ibidem, p. 46-47. The original said: "Qais 'Aylan," but the correct is: "Qais &'Aylan."
[173] Ibidem, p. 47.
[174] A sect that is said to have been formed by the Jew; Abdullah Ibn Saba'. It is said they believe that Ali didn't die and that he will return before the Day of Judgment and fill the earth with justice.
[175] Kathir Ibn Shihab al-Harithi a supporter of the Umayyad dynasty and opposed to the supporters of Ali.
[176] Ibidem, p. 47-48
[177] Ibidem, p. 48.

Then he made an oath and said:

بربِّ الحرَمِ، والبيتِ المحرَّمِ، والركنِ المكرَّمِ، والمسجدِ المعظَّمِ، وحقِّ ذي القلم، ليُرفعنّ لي علم، من هنا إلى أضَم، ثمّ إلى أكناف ذي سلم

"By the Lord of the Sanctuary, and the Forbidden House, and the blessed corner, and the glorified mosque, and by the right of the scholar, I swear that surely a flag will be raised for me from here to Mecca and then to the heart of the valley of Thu Salam."[178]

Then he threatened:

أمّا وربِّ السماء، لتنزلنّ نارٌ من السماء، فلتحرِقنّ دارَ أسماء

"By the Lord of the heaven, there will verily descend from the sky a fire, which will burn up the house of Asma'."[179]

The one called Asma' in this piece is Abu Hassan ibn Kharijah al-Fazari al-Kufi, who was one of the nobles of the people of al-Madinah, and amongst the notable followers, who died about 65 AH. So when he heard this utterance, he became frightened for his life and fled from his house saying, "Abu Ishaq has composed Saj' about me! Indeed, my house will be burnt down," and he went out of his house instantly. So Mukhtar sent someone to his house to burn it down secretly at night. The next day, it appeared that a fire had come down from the sky and burnt it down.[180]

Then, the people of Kufa went out against al-Mukhtar because of his soothsaying, and especially because he had promised to share amongst them the wealth of their chiefs. So al-Mukhtar fought them and defeated them and killed some of them and took some captive. Amongst the captives was a clever poet by the name of Suraqah ibn Mirdas al-Bariqi. He was afraid that al-Mukhtar would kill him, so he said to his captors, "It was not you that captured us, nor was it you, with your hordes, that defeated us. What defeated us were the angels that I saw riding piebald stallions above your army's flanks." He then took an oath (in front of the people) that he saw angels fighting with Mukhtar, just as they had fought with the prophet during the battle of Badr and the battle of Hunayn as the Qur'ān relates. Then Suraqah curried favour with al-Mukhtar by reciting some verses of poetry, including:

نُصرتَ على عدوِّكَ كلَّ يومٍ بكلِّ كتيبةٍ تَنعي حُسَينا
كنصرِ محمّدٍ في يومِ بدْرٍ ويومِ الشعبِ إذ لاقَى حُنينا

[178] Ibidem, p. 48
[179] Ibidem, p. 48
[180] Ibidem, p. 48.

You are victorious over your enemy in every battle; With every battalion that laments over Husayn

Like the victory of Muhammad in the battle of Badr; The battle of tribes when they met at Hunayn

Al-Mukhtar was impressed by him, and so forgave him and let him go. But when Suraqah had got a safe distance away his companions asked him about what he had seen, he replied, "I was never more false in an oath than I was when I said I saw angels." Then he joined the army of Mus'ab ibn al-Zubayr, the enemy of al-Mukhtar in Basra, and sent these verses mocking him:

ألا أَبلِغْ أبا إسحقَ أنّي رأيتُ البُلقَ دهْماً مُعتِماتِ
وكفرتُ بوحيِكُم وجعلتُ نذراً عليَّ قتالَكم حتّى المماتِ
أُري عينيَّ ما لم تُبصراهُ كلانا عالِمٌ بالتَرَّهاتِ
إذا قالوا أقولُ لهم كذبْتُم وإنْ خرجوا لبستُ لهم أداتي

Why don't you announce, Abu Ishaq (Al-Mukhtar), that I saw dark piebald stallions descending suddenly?

While I disbelieve in your revelations and I have made a vow to fight you until death,

My eyes feigned to see that which they didn't see, for we both know how to hoax,

When they speak, I tell them that you lied, and if they come out (to fight), I will clothe them with my sword.[181]

Now, after this brief survey of the Saj' of soothsayers and the Saj' of the Qur'ān, which I restricted myself to excerpts from the opening verses of a few suras near the end with the examples of oaths that had no final clause (and in the knowledge that the other longer suras of the Qur'ān also contain short pieces of Saj' that lack meaning or sense), I say after this brief survey that I hope the reader who has an open, critical mind that is able to judge objectively and impartially. I hope you can see with clear vision the similarities between these two examples of Saj': the Saj' of the soothsayers and the Saj' of the Qur'ān.

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*The Qur'ān and the Belief in the Unseen:*

[181] Muhammad 'Izzat Darwaza, "A History of the Arab People," 8/397.

We must use our mind rather than traditions. Knowledge and intellect rather than magic and hidden secrets. On humanity, rather than an invisible creator. But most of all, before anything else, we must abandon the world of the unseen and start living in the real world. We must strive to achieve our utmost using reason and logic rather than surrendering to apathy[182] that places faith in the unseen, hoping that, after we die, we will have a happy and bountiful life full of the delights of paradise, such as the Houris, palaces, soft couches, gardens, and rivers.

Without doubt, the most pernicious disease that has become deeply-rooted in our cultural mentality is belief in the unseen. It is this that has seduced our minds and emotions since the dawn of Islam. Allah made it a condition of faith by saying things such as: "Alif Lam Meem, that book in which there is no doubt, a guidance for the pious who believe in the unseen and establish prayer and spend from that which we provide for them." (2:1-3)

Nothing can be more indicative of the importance of the unseen in Islam than the fact that the word appears 48 times in the Qur'ān. This wretched word has dominated us, and continues to dominate us. It has bedeviled our history and collective consciousness, it has held our willpower hostage, and shackled our mind in chains that cannot be broken. It is has provided support for every good-for-nothing, incompetent, deadbeat idle-loafer and such like from custodians of the temple and those who bask in other people's fire.

In as much as the Qur'ān was a factor behind the rise of the Arabs and their appearance on the world stage and participation in science and civilisation, it has become, since the beginning of the age of decline, a source of backwardness. Its role in advancing the Arabs has finished. It has spent and exhausted its usefulness in helping us progress, and has now turned back in on itself and takes us backwards. It propels us into the arms of the past and the world of the unseen.

Religion, almost by definition, directs your attention towards the unseen: God, angels, and the next life. That is its primary function. When a religion is new, it can be a force for change. It can be dynamic and innovative. But in later years it becomes the opposite. It becomes a force of stagnation, looking backwards to the past. It is reactionary and regressive. The religious person cannot ever forget the past, whether Muslim, Christian, or Jew. The Qur'ān, however, more than any of these religions, makes faith in the unseen a firmly-established principle. It placed it before all other acts of worship. That is how it is placed within the heart of the previously mentioned verse. It specifies the Muttaqeen (pious) as being "those who believe in the unseen" first! Then, after that, "those who establish prayer." Verses about the unseen are repeated frequently in the Qur'ān. The faith of a believer is incomplete without belief in the unseen, and if he dies in such a state that he would have died without true faith, may Allah Most High preserve him!

At first, belief in the unseen was merely one of the articles of faith and was fairly innocuous, but since the dawn of our decline it has become a symptom of disease. A source of stagnation and surrendering our responsibilities. It became the key to the secrets of the next world, and mystic religious prattle typified by the Sufis with their efforts to annihilate the self and subsume their being through repetitive chanting and rhythmic swaying. We, too, have become like these whirling dervishes, comatose as we go through life in circles, like the dervishes during their halaqat. Losing our minds and critical abilities in exchange for the sedative drug of the unseen world. We are engrossed in ruku' and sujud, qiyam and qu'ud. We give lessons on Tawakkul, a total reliance on God and on His plan for us, drawn from verses such as:

[182] An example of where this sort of apathy takes place is during the month of Ramadan, where work often takes second place to prayers, fasting and staying up making Du'a.

*"And He will provide him from where he could never imagine. And whoever puts their trust in Allah, then He will suffice him. Verily, Allah will accomplish His purpose…"*

*(65:3)*

We even detail the different levels of Tawakkul that the believer should attain. The highest is to completely hand over all matters and management of our affairs to God. Of course, many will temper this by adding we should also tie our camels first and attend to the affairs of the world. Yet, despite this, the pious value given to total reliance on God is greater. The affairs of this world are belittled and only have value in that they help us achieve the next world. The stories of the pious are littered with tales of how they turned away from this lowly world and thought of nothing but the life to come, spending what they had earned that day on their immediate needs and giving away the rest before night would fall, as the prophet had done.

We beseech Allah morning and night to help the Muslims, to make them united and strong and to destroy our enemies. We beseech him to cure the sick and comfort the poor. We beseech him to solve our problems and right the wrongs. Our throats have become hoarse from imploring God. Our fingers arthritic from making tasbeeh, but we shall never tire of making du'a nor desist from tasbeeh. We shall continue beseeching Allah and chanting thikr and twirling around without our mind, or thoughts, or the desire to take control of matters ourselves.

We place great importance on arguing about when Ramadan begins, where to place the hands while in Qiyam, or whether pronouncing divorce three times is valid or not, but we all agree to submit like sheep to our tyrants and dictators. We agree to shut our eyes to the corruption and we agree to say nothing when the few voices that are raised in dissent are ruthlessly silenced.

For over one thousand years (since the decline of Arab civilisation), we and our Imams in the mosques have been beseeching Allah to alleviate the suffering of the Muslims and give us success and victory, and we will continue to beseech him until the Day of Judgment. The time has come to realise that Allah (if this word has any meaning) doesn't care about you and your problems in the real world. He is too busy in the unseen world. This world with all of its complex problems and issues that you divorced three times is of no concern to Him.

The Qur'ān once moved people to achieve great things, and, as we discussed previously, the Qur'ān contains some masterpieces, some good passages, some indifferent ones and some poor ones. But to the Arabs at the time, it was, on the whole, an amazing and inspiring work. The good, the bad, the nonsense, the eloquent, the threats, the promises, the true and the false all combined to move the Arabs, to inspire and unite them. But, like any human work, it is tied to time and place it was composed in. The Qur'ān has long since lost the positive effect it first had. Despite the Qur'ān's strong presence today in our societies' politics, economies, and public and private lives, it has become a stagnant, musical backdrop that does not bring about any effective action or results apart from negative ones. Today, it turns us inward and leaves us as mere spectators to the course of human progress.

Every page of the Qur'ān is dominated and permeated with a deeply-entrenched doctrine of Predestination (al-Qadaa' wa al-Qadar, or the "Divine Verdict and Decree") that one cannot miss, although the hadith literature supporting this doctrine was not apparent, or did not yet exist in early times when the Islamic empire was being built. If they had been, it is doubtful that there would have been an Islamic Caliphate at all! For when man is faced with extremely challenging and dangerous situations, he will ignore any idea of predestination, regardless of what his belief

is about it. I say that, although the hadith literature supporting this doctrine was not apparent or did not exist at the time of the rise of the Islamic empire, it was very apparent and widespread during the periods of our decline. In fact, it hastened this decline and brought it forward before its time. Its poison and venom spread to infect the dynamism of the later Muslims, paralysing every field of activity.

Predestination does not create enlightened people; it creates slaves. It does not build vibrant nations; it creates petty statelets and backward dictatorships. Predestination does not unite; it disperses and divides. It does not drive forward science; it pushes us back into ignorance. It does not create great civilisations or flourishing cities; on the contrary, it destroys and dismantles civilisations. If you see a people who are advanced, progressive, with a flourishing, vibrant culture and civilisation, you can be sure that predestination played no part in it.

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*Inhumanity of the Qur'ān:*

The enemy that the Qur'ān hates most of all is someone who has confidence in himself and believes in himself. That crime will never be forgiven.

*"They say, 'If it had been up to us, not so many would have been killed here.' Say; 'Even if you had been inside your houses, those decreed to be killed would have gone out (of their houses) to the place they were slain.'"*

*(3:154)*

This verse is about a group of Muslims during the battle of Uhud who were unhappy with the way the battle was planned and implemented. They thought they could have done a better job, but Allah rebukes them, saying it was fate, and no-one can change fate. In the battle of Badr, it wasn't the Muslim fighters who killed the polytheists. It was Allah alone who killed them. It wasn't even the archers who shot the arrows—it was Allah!

*"You did not slay them; it was Allah Who slew them. And you did not shoot when you shot (the enemy), but it was Allah Who shot."*
*(8:17)*

We do not even have control over our own thoughts and ideas: "And know that Allah intervenes between man and his heart." (8:24)

The polytheist in the Qur'ān is not a human being. He is below that by a long way. The Qur'ān regards the polytheist as a primitive barbarian, an uncivilised being lacking any dignity:

*"O, you who believe! the idolaters are nothing but filth, so do not let them come near the Sacred Mosque after this year."*

*(9:28)*

How often I would wince at the Qur'ān's use of the word "filth" (نَجَس) to describe other human beings. It is such an ugly word that I felt did not befit the speech of The Compassionate, The Merciful. I myself feel shy to use such language towards a fellow human being, no matter how much of an enemy he may be to me. But to apply that to a human being whose crime is nothing other than exercising his freedom to think for himself and make up his own mind about what he wants to worship, no matter how much that may differ from my views! As for God Himself uttering such a word and sending it down from heaven to be recited and used in pious worship in our prayers and religious rites—that is something I cannot ever understand!

It would have been very easy to use a better and less vulgar word that would suit the unattainable eloquence and miraculous style that is attributed to the Qur'ān. That sublime miraculousness that no human can attain, no matter how gifted or skilled he may be. And is this the sort of dirty language that the Qur'ān wants us to use towards those who differ from us? Is this how we must perceive them and base our relationship with them on? Is this how we must deal with those who have different beliefs and views? For no other reason than they have a different religion or belief? There is a saying that "bigotry is a disease," and that is very true. Even Allah is not safe from it.

Another example of inhumanity in the Quran is the depreciation of women. The Qur'ān likens women to agricultural land that is ploughed and seeded. Fertile soil for planting that you can enter whenever and however you like.

*"Your wives are a tilth for you, so go into your tilth when/however you like."*

*(2:223)*

Another is cutting the hand of the male or female thief:

*"As for the man who steals and the woman who steals, cut off their hands as a punishment for what they have earned."*

*(5:38)*

Another is killing prisoners of war[183]:

[183] There is a slight difference of opinion regarding this verse. Some commentators cite hadith that the prophet consulted Abu Bakr and Umar about what to do with the captives from the battle of Badr. Umar said execute them, while Abu Bakr said ransom them. The prophet took Abu Bakr's advice. Then the hadiths relate that this verse was revealed rebuking the Muslims for ransoming them when they should have been killed. Others say it means that no captives should have been taken and that the pagan army should have been chased down and slaughtered.

*"It is not for any prophet to have captives until he hath made slaughter in the land."*

*(8:67)*

Another is flogging the male and female fornicator. Nay! Stoning them, and in front of witnesses, according to hadith. You're not even allowed to feel the normal human emotions of pity and compassion!

*"The woman and the man guilty of adultery or fornication, flog each of them with a hundred stripes: Let not compassion move you in their case, when it comes to the religion of God, if you believe in Allah and the Last Day: and let a party of the Believers witness their punishment."*

*(24:2)*

When a man[184] wishes to divorce his wife, he simply has to say Talaq (divorce) three times: "Divorce, divorce, divorce!"

*"Divorce may be pronounced twice, then either keep them on good terms or let them go with kindness… but if he divorces her (a third time), then she is not lawful to him until she has married another husband."*

*(2:229-230)*[185]

The early Muslims accepted all of that—in fact, more than that—and never opposed it nor rebelled against it. As long as they believed it came from heaven, they had to simply prostrate in humble obedience. But how can we, today, as we enter the new millennium, continue to still carry with us such primitive baggage? Such inhumanity that we inherited from our ancestors? That Heaven and Earth colluded to initiate us at birth into? How can we build our future and that of our children with such a backward mentality that is frozen in time? The clock stopped at a past age of glory: the time when the Arabs led the world. But then we fell, and time fell with us.

Oh, how we lament the bygone era! We are grief-stricken and stuck in the past. When will we realise that the past belongs where it is? Time has moved on. We must open the shutters and clear the dust away. It is time for us to move on, also.

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184 When a woman wants divorce (in her case it's called Khula) it is far more complex. Whereas a husband does not need a wife's consent to divorce, she must seek his consent and he can refuse her a divorce if he wants to. In this case she will have to petition a judge. In most cases she can only petition for Khula if she can prove that her husband hasn't had sex with her for two months, or if her husband doesn't provide for her. She will also usually be expected to pay the dowry back and in most cases lose the custody of any children the couple have.

185 Why should a divorced couple who have reconciled and wish to remarry, be prevented from doing so unless the woman marries another man and has sexual intercourse with him and then divorce him?

# Chapter Five: God in the Qur'ān

*The Existence and the non-Existence of God is the Same Thing:*

Man cannot live without meaning. Without some sort of framework or narrative that gives his life purpose. The problem is that there is no built-in meaning to life. Life is the meaning you give to it. Most of us received our meaning from our parents when we were children, and our parents received it from their parents. These meanings were created by our distant ancestors in an earlier time, and although humanity has moved on in other ways, we still cling to these ancient superstitions and myths. The greatest of these by far is the belief in God or gods. Despite the fact that no-one has seen God and reason is unable to confirm his existence, the vast majority of mankind accept completely and blindly that God exists. Moreover, we do not simply say we believe it, but we claim it is a certainty, something natural and instinctive that we just *know* with absolute conviction, and it requires no proof.

Belief in gods and supernatural powers goes back to the dawn of history. But this doesn't mean belief in God is instinctive. It's interesting to note the "One True God" of the Abrahamic faiths is conspicuous by its absence in early religious beliefs which were largely based around worship of animals or animal spirits, such as the bear and the bull, or fertility goddesses, or worship of the sun and celestial bodies, which are all things early man would have either been in awe of, feared, or needed to survive. If the history of religious beliefs tells us anything, then they tell us only that man has always sought a crutch to hold onto in an often harsh and cruel world where he feels helpless and alone. He has sought to allay his fears of death and cling on to hope that his efforts are not in vain. Wearing an amulet to make the hunt successful, offering a sacrifice to a fertility goddess so crops won't fail, performing some ritual before a sea journey or muttering incantations before a battle in the vain hope that it will make a difference. It is hard for man to accept the truth of his condition as it is without the comfort of angels, Paradise, and a god who watches over him night and day.

Of course, believers down the ages have tried to offer rational arguments for the existence of God. Among the most popular is the argument that everything has a cause, so the universe must have a cause, and that cause must be must be an all-powerful being that transcends the laws of causality. Firstly, this says nothing about which God this is. Secondly, if this God has no cause, then the premise is wrong: not everything had a cause! Thirdly, the problem with invoking the supernatural is that reason and logic no longer apply and literally anything can be claimed. The truth is that it is impossible to prove for certain whether some sort of supernatural being exists or not. Reason is of no use here. This question will remain unanswered until the end of time.

No, it is not reason or logic that is behind faith in God. It is emotion, like that of a little child who needs his parents and is afraid of parting from them. He is scared if they go away, and screams and cries if they leave him with someone else. Or, if he wakes up in the night to find they are not there, he is beside himself with anguish. This underlying need for security and the fear of being alone and helpless is one of the reasons why we remain so attached to the myth of God.

However, the believer will claim that his belief is perfectly rational and will come up with all sorts of proofs and evidences to prove God exists. He cannot see the flaws in his arguments. If you point them out, he will either fly off the handle or end the discussion and walk away while mocking your stupidity. You have exposed the things he hides from himself. Despite that, he will remain clinging to his faith and will avoid discussion with you again, since you have threatened his whole identity, his very existence. It is better you stop there and don't pursue the subject.

He is not alone, for scholars and philosophers throughout history have devoted themselves to defending these ancient myths. So much ink has been spilled by great minds down the ages to prove the existence of a God who refuses to prove it himself. We believe in God first, then invent evidence and proofs to support our belief in order to fool ourselves that our faith has a rational basis. To fulfil our childish need for comfort and support. To satisfy a metaphysical curiosity that asks, "Why we are here? What is it for?" Our inquisitive nature constantly wonders, speculates, and enquires about the mystery of existence. We crave reassurance, meaning, and purpose to make our existence more bearable than it is. For we live in the midst of a confusing world full of drama, difficulties, and tragedy.

But whether God exists or not, the universe will go on according to the laws of nature. Everything working by itself without a creator, without a caretaker, without a point, without an end, without outside interference. Likewise is mankind. For if the whole universe gets along just fine without any interference, then man is no different. Not to mention the abundance of evidence in our daily lives that are a testament to the lack of divine intervention. We are in no need of a selfish tyrant who conceals himself from us, then demands we recognise and worship him. And this is according to the sayings, testimonies, and stories of a few individuals, the prophets, who claim that God has spoken to them, and that they speak for God.

Until now, I cannot understand any meaning to belief in God when he doesn't stir a finger nor leave a trace. The only meaning I can think of is a psychological meaning: that we created God to fill a psychological need.

To those who say: "This Sun and moon, these stars and planets, this whole amazing, natural law that makes everything work beautifully…doesn't that indicate anything? Is all of that just by chance? Can things happen without someone making them happen? Or be created without a creator?" I say: "I don't know, and I doubt I'll ever know. All I can say is that everything follows natural laws and processes and evolution. It has been like that for as long as I know, and I have no reason to think it won't continue like that. I don't see a God in these things."

Let me ask a question: has God ever put out a fire? Saved the drowning? Cured the sick? Fed the starving? Halted disease? Averted disaster? Direct me to one instance where God has done anything? Any example where God was involved? If not, then all that is in Heaven and Earth, and the stars and planets, all of its perfection, order, and beauty do not amount to one tear trickling down the cheek of a mother holding her dying child.

If faith in God is lost, then the whole edifice comes crashing down. Gone is hope, dreams, angels, prophets, and paradise. Instead, the stark reality of our condition and mortality becomes painfully clear, and this is something man doesn't want to face. So the believer has a strong incentive to cling on to faith in God. He doesn't want to die, so he creates the idea that death is simply a door to a new life—the real life. Although this life is temporary, the next life is everlasting. This life is full of pain, struggle, and suffering, but the next life is full of pleasure, joy, and happiness. It is a concept that has become deeply embedded in the human psyche.

So he will use every means possible to preserve that which guarantees him immortality. Performing mental gymnastics to "prove" whatever is necessary to ensure his everlasting happiness. Blame himself and his own shortcomings if something doesn't make sense rather than question his beliefs. I have to admit that I do pity him and I am hesitant to take away that comfort blanket from his tight grip when it makes him happy. But, at the same time, I fear the damage it does in dulling and paralysing his faculties.

Perhaps we should leave people in their delusions. Perhaps it is impossible to completely free them from myths. They serve a purpose. Since God is the greatest of these delusions, then it is from faith in Him that people derive the greatest pleasure. The believers fight with the "Sword of God," and no matter how many times they are defeated, humiliated, and crushed, they will not stop believing that God will bring them victory—if not in this world, then in the next.

Some people seem to think that those of us who doubt God's existence do so simply on the basis that we can't see Him. They point out that there are innumerable things one can't see but that we know they exist, such as radio waves, sound waves, ultraviolet light, microorganisms, et cetera. Men of religion mock when someone says he disbelieves in God because sees no evidence for Him, and reply sarcastically: "Then you don't believe in Hong Kong because you can't see it."

But disbelief in God has nothing to do with such a ridiculously simplistic level of understanding. We doubt God's existence because no-one can verify that He exists. We don't need to see Hong Kong or radio waves or microorganisms to know they exist, because others have seen them or studied them or tested them and verified them from multiple sources. If I am ever in doubt about their existence, I can conduct my own scientific experiments to verify them myself. I can visit Hong Kong if I suspect a global conspiracy to hide the fact that Hong Kong doesn't exist. However, when it comes to God, you cannot find one witness in the whole world who has seen or spoken to God. You cannot find one single scientist who has scientifically established God's existence. Nor can you verify these claims yourself, either by travelling to a place to meet God, or by conducting your own experiments to establish His existence. Furthermore, you see in the world around you a world that runs by itself with no interference or intervention.

*"Can there be doubt about God, the creator of the heavens and the earth?"*

*(14:10)*

Yes, there can! And not just one doubt, but many doubts. How great are the doubts about Him, Most High is He!

They claim that there is no "doubt" about the existence of God. That belief in the One True God is a natural instinct, "Fitrah." Humanity's natural disposition which God has created us with. But if that were true, then why have religious scholars down the ages toiled and laboured to produce libraries full of arguments trying to establish that God exists? Why have they not similarly wasted their time writing volumes about the existence of the sun? Mankind has never declared war against or persecuted or committed atrocities upon those who deny the existence of the sun. If God's existence was "without doubt," as they claim, then why the need for arguments, proofs, and evidences? That

which is without doubt has no need for these things. One only needs to present arguments and proofs where there is doubt. That which has no doubt is not in need of proof.

Yes, man has a tendency and need for a crutch. These feelings increase in times of crisis and insecurity. The desire for a crutch reveals an inner psychological need. It reflects an underlying existential crisis that human beings have at one time or another experienced ever since they became self-aware beings and began to think beyond the mechanics of survival. When they started to think in the abstract and pose questions about their existence.

All this is not evidence of a God, nor is it evidence of the need for a God. It is merely the reality of our evolution. God is a redundant addition invented by man during his evolution as he developed the capacity for introspection and abstract thinking in a world that was dangerous and frightening, where he sought help to survive in any way he can. He tried appealing to the forces or spirits in nature. To gods that were more powerful than the gods of a hostile tribe. To a God who was bigger and stronger than them all! It is a concept we have become deeply emotionally attached to and find impossible to let go of. It is a refuge for the poor, weak, destitute and deprived who are powerless, and so seek a powerful guardian full of love, care, and affection, who will right the wrongs, bring justice, security, and peace. But when they find he doesn't bring anything except more suffering, they do not leave him. No, they blame themselves and increase their devotion and give each other the good news of the reward to come that shall be all the greater for their suffering.

It never occurs to them that there is no-one listening to their prayers. That this God they are asking for help is their own invention, born out of their despair and loss of hope in the bitter reality that they find themselves in. They live in a waking dream: the dream of Paradise, which contains that which no eye has seen nor ear heard nor has occurred to the mind of man, where the Houris will come running to meet them and welcome them in to their palace in Heaven where servants will fulfil every command. A beautiful illusion, indeed; and when an illusion embeds itself into the mind, it can be so sweet, so powerful, that it replaces reality.

I have no problem with anyone who says they believe in God, so long as they don't try to claim it is more than just a belief. So long as they don't claim it is a certainty.

*"And on the earth are signs for those who are certain."*

*(51:20)*

If you were to say to me that the existence of the universe leads you to believe there is a creator, I will not argue with you. That is your right. I have no problem with that. In fact, I will go as far as to say it is a possibility. Who knows? But if you tell me it is certain and say that doubting it is a crime, then that is something no intelligent person should ever accept. As Voltaire said, "Doubt is an uncomfortable position, but certainty is an absurd one."

Never mind that the heart (emotion) and mind (reason) both participate when it comes to matters like this, making it impossible to be certain what part the heart plays and what part the mind plays. For the heart has its demands and biases that are hidden from the mind, while the mind has a rigidity and dryness that the heart flees from. So the mind adopts the methods of the heart, and the heart leads the mind meekly to where it wants to go. They both

want to maintain comfort and security they experience from this belief, so they join forces according to an unwritten agreement and secret collusion. They weave around it a spider's web, even though "The flimsiest of houses is the house of the spider!"

Underlying everything man does is a survival instinct. It helped his species endure against all odds in cruel and brutal environments. A survival instinct does not have the ability to weigh up long term pros and cons of a particular course of action; it must act immediately and snatch whatever tools are at hand to ensure survival. This survival instinct found belief in God a useful psychological coping tool. What are Heaven and Houris other than just comforting consolations for this wretched, tragic creature called man?

This God that man believes in has not given him anything during all the times he has suffered. He has never answered a request. Never fulfilled a need. Never satisfied a hunger. Never cured the afflicted. No, he has left man twisting in misery and pain without lifting a finger. Yet, man makes excuses for Him, for the promises soothe him, the happy visions and sublime dreams anaesthetise pain. He will excuse this God. For these delights are not for this evil world that is not even worth the wing of a gnat.[186] No, this is for the perfect world to come, where there is no place for hunger, tears, grief, and sorrow. Oh, how man values this next life when he will return to his Lord and experience nothing but happiness, pleasure, bliss, and songs. A place full of joyful celebrations and luxurious gratification with "Firm-breasted maidens," (78:33) "pearls well-guarded," (52:24) who take pleasure in coquettish flirtation, cuddles, and titillation.

Do you see the mechanisms of survival that help man cope and get by? Even though the reality of life crushes him, there remains a small corner of hope within him that never fails, a light that never diminishes, and a spring that flows eternal. The incentive to go on remains strong. How patiently does he bear the "slings and arrows." How inventive is he in clinging on to existence and in justifying the vicissitudes of existence, hanging on in quiet desperation!

Would that I knew what life was all about. Would that I knew what existence is. Does existence even have a meaning? But this question cannot be answered. It is a mystery and will remain a mystery. The playground is known, but the player is unknown. The game is a competition between the known and unknown. Puppets that move, marionettes that dance. We can't see behind the curtain, nor even catch sight of the strings, even though we are the leading actors, complicit in its drama.

This question has perplexed the greatest thinkers. Faces turn away in confusion and minds are confounded and bemused. Man: the master of the universe, or an insignificant extra? We know so much and yet so little. How strange is the condition of man!

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[186] Sahl bin Sa'd narrated that the Messenger of Allah said: "If the world to Allah were equal to a mosquito's wing, then He would not allow the disbeliever to have a sip of water from it." [Chapters on Zuhd: Jami At-Tirmidhi]. It means that the world is worth nothing at all, to God, so he allows the disbelievers to have of it as much as they like.

*Attributes of God in the Qur'ān:*

The existence of God in the Qur'ān is one of the basic assumptions that the believer just has to accept. "Can there be any doubt about God, the creator of the heavens and the earth?" (14:10) For that reason, the Qur'ān does not concern itself with proving his existence as much as it devotes itself to establishing the "Oneness" of God and negating that He has any partner. But it does bring attention to the variety of His signs in creation, even though these signs, despite their number, don't mean much upon reflection. None of them reach the level of what one could call evidence in the scientific sense, though, to the common man, they are beyond the level of evidence, and are, in fact, irrefutable proofs. This "evidence" simply points out familiar phenonmena in nature and in the lives of people at the time that were of benefit or importance. They are phrased in a way that one can read into it whatever one wants to, and discover in it whatever one desires according to his psychological needs, his spiritual leanings, and his philosophy of life.

God in the Qur'ān is described with all the attributes of perfection, and free from all attributes of deficiency:

The Single, the Pure, the Lord, the One, the Unique. He has no companion nor son. The Knower of the Unseen and the Seen. He has power over everything. He is the First and the Last. The Apparent and the Hidden. The Originator of the heavens and Earth. The Strong, the Wise. "He is Allah, besides Whom there is no god; the King, the Holy, the Giver of peace, the Granter of security, Guardian over all, the Mighty… He is Allah the Creator, the Maker, the Fashioner; His are the most beautiful names." (59:23-24)

These are a few of the "beautiful names," or attributes, of God in the Qur'ān. According to hadith[187], there are 99 names of God, though, in fact, there are many more than that. There are some that the Qur'ān mentions, such as The Lord (الرب) The Protector (المولى), The Near (القريب) and The Mighty Creator, (الخلاق) but these are not found in the list of 99, while names such as The Sublime (الجليل), The Finder (الواجد), and The Noble (الماجد) are not mentioned in the Qur'ān, but are included in the list of 99.

As you can see, these are positive attributes. But the problem is that they do not suffice, on their own, to explain everything that happens in this world. For, if it is true that God is good and omnipotent, then these positive attributes don't cover the bad things that happen, and this is the philosophical problem of evil that has existed since time immemorial. For this reason, it is necessary to add to these attributes others that are opposite to them to balance out the reality of this world both good and evil, beauty and ugliness, complete and impaired. This is, of course, if we want to free God from any notion of having a partner or assistant[188], or female companion or son[189]. Otherwise, we would find the floor open to the Devil to do whatever he wants. In which case, one would have to wonder: what is the relationship between God and the Devil? For if he is not a partner with God, then what exactly is he?

So the Qur'ān ascribes other attributes to God, some of which have made it to the list of 99, and some of which haven't. Amongst those that have are: The Harmer (الضار), The Arrogant (المتكبر), The Debaser (المذل), The Bringer of Death (المميت), The Humiliator (الخافض), The Withholder (المانع), The Straightener (القابض), The Oppressor (الجبار), The Abasing Conqueror (القهار), and The One Who Takes Revenge (المنتقم). One of those not mentioned in the

[187] Abu Huraira reported Allah's Messenger as saying: "There are ninety-nine names of Allah; he who commits them to memory would get into Paradise." (Muslim)
[188] Sura Al-Kahf 18:51 "Nor do I take misleaders as assistants."
[189] Sura al-Jinn 72:3 "He has taken niether female companion nor son."

list of 99, but which, without doubt, should be near the top, is The Torturer (المعذب), due to the number of times the Qur'ān ascribes this attribute to God.

Muslim scholars and Qur'ānic commentators stood before these less-than-beautiful attributes with their hands tied, unable to do anything other than try to ameliorate their impact in their usual way of patching-up and waffling to try and disassociate God from any base or lowly charachteristics, or from any hint of faults or imperfections in His nature. "Glory be to Him, and Most High is He above that which they ascribe to Him." (6:100)

But they are caught between a rock and a hard place. Is God all good or not? If he is, then how can one explain these attributes? If not, then is a God who is less than good worthy of worship? Should the evil in the world be attributed to the Devil? Does that make the Devil a partner in crime, or a fall guy to take the blame? "Say: praise be to God, who has not taken a son and has no partner in the dominion and has no protector from disgrace. So magnify Him with all magnificence." (17:111)

There is no option other than to accept that these negative attributes are intrinsic attributes of God in the Qur'ān, despite the fact that the Mufassirun vainly attempt to explain them away by changing the clear meaning to another meaning entirely so as to suit their naïve and forced efforts to rescue the Qur'ān from what it actually says. When discussing the good attributes, they are happy to take them at face value and according to their obvious meaning, but if they are "bad" attributes, then we must *not* take them at face value; we must instead twist and turn upside-down and find another meaning. This is the methodolgy of the Qur'ānic commentators.

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*God and Satan: Two Sides of the Same Coin:*

*"We said to the angels: Prostrate to Adam. So they did prostrate except Iblis; he was not of those who prostrated..."*

*(7:11-25)*

One of the most absurd and childish myths found in both Islam and Christianity is that of Satan, who misleads, tempts, and encourages man to sin. This creature that God created and made amongst the most honoured creatures in the holy company. He was present during the theatrical moment when God asked everyone to bow down to man. Satan refused, and so God cursed him and sent him away—though clearly not far enough, because he sneaked back into Heaven to tell Adam and Eve to go and eat from the tree that God forbade them from approaching. God then reproaches Adam and Eve and sends them both down to Earth, where Satan has promised to lie in wait for them and their children and mislead, tempt, and seduce them.

Now if God knew Satan would turn evil, which He must have, why did He create him? The only answer can be that God intended all this to happen. Nothing can happen unless Allah wills it, nor can it happen if it is not in God's plan. So God wanted him to turn evil and wanted him to sneak around, misguiding humans. Satan, for his part, seems to think he can prove something to God. Which is very odd, to say the least, since Satan knows he's dealing

with an Omnipotent and Omniscient Being, so therefore he knows he stands absolutely no chance. It is said he wants to take as many of mankind down to Hell with him. But how that would give him satisfaction when he is being eternally tortured is beyond me. It's hard to understand what a supposedly-intelligent being who had firsthand experience of this omnipotent God was thinking? It's a bad move, indeed. But one that God clearly intended him to make, so He could fulfil His grand plan. Now, an impartial observer might say that it is God who is the wicked one here, while Satan is simply a pawn in His game…but far be it from me to suggest such a thing!

So what is this grand plan? To test man so that believers can be separated from unbelievers? The former to Paradise, the latter to Hell? Though this was, of course, not for God's benefit, because He already knew who would be good and who would be bad. It was for our benefit so we can't complain that we weren't given a chance. Though, if he didn't create the bad people in the first place, there would be no need for anyone to complain, so I don't see the purpose of this whole charade from the Most Merciful. Also, if it's true that Shaytan could still rebel against God even though He was in Heaven, then couldn't this same problem arise amongst those who go to heaven? Or will God take away their free-will? Or, perhaps, those in heaven, having been tested here on Earth, will be of such a good nature that they will never rebel? If so, couldn't God have spared us this pantomime by creating them that way right from the start? No need for shayaateen, sin, tempting, burning fire, roasted skins, hooked rods of iron, or vats of boiling oil. Or is God incapable of doing that?

When one reads the Qur'ān, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Satan is a very necessary character. The villain to God. Someone who can be blamed for evil. It does seem at times that Satan and God are just two sides of the same coin. In fact, the Qur'ān often applies the same attributes to both God and Satan. For example, misguidance:

*"And God misguides the wrongdoers, and God does whatever He wants."*

*(27:14)*

*"God guides who He wants and misleads who He wants."*

*(35:8)*

*"And he who God misguides, he will have no-one to guide him."*

*(13:33)*

*"Do you want to guide he who God has misguided?"*

*(4:88)*

And of Iblis:

*"Do not follow desires for he (shaytan) will misguide you from the path of God."*

*(38:26)*

*"It is written that whomsoever takes him (shaytan) as a friend/helper, then indeed he will misguide him."*

*(22:4)*

*"Shaytan wants but to misguide them a far misguidance."*

*(4:60)*

*"Indeed, he (shaytan) has misguided from amongst you a great multitude can you not use your mind?"*

*(36:62)*

And of making bad actions seem good:

*"Those who don't believe in the next life, We have made seem good to them their actions."*

*(27:4)*

*"Likewise, We made seem good to every nation their deeds."*

*(6:108)*

And of Iblis:

*"And Shaytan has made seem good to them what they used to do."*

*(27:24)*

*:He (Iblees) said: 'My Lord, since You have seduced me astray, I will surely make (disobedience) attractive to them on earth, and I will seduce them all astray."*

*(15:39)*

I'm confused. Who is the one who misguides people? Who is the one who makes evil deeds seem good?

There are other bad attributes that God shares with the Devil. For example, in that last verse (15:39), we see that both seduce people astray. Also, "We have certainly tempted those before them." (29:3) – "O, children of Adam, do not let Shaytan tempt you." (7:26)

Thus, misguidance, making bad seem good, seduction, and temptation are all evil attributes shared by God and Iblis, according to the text of the Qur'ān. So what is the difference between them? Are they not just two sides of the same coin? If you are in any doubt about that, then take a look at this long verse, and see if you can distinguish between God, Satan, Angels, and shayaateen:

*"They followed what the shayaateen recited in the reign of Solomon. Solomon did not disbelieve, but the shayaateen disbelieved, teaching man magic and that which was revealed to the two angels of Babylon, Harut and Marut. They did not teach it to anyone till they had said:*

*we are only a temptation, therefore do not disbelieve. And from these two (angels) people learned that by which they cause division between man and wife; but they can't harm anyone with it, save by Allah's permission. They learn that which harms them and does not profit them. And, surely, they do know that he who trafficketh therein will have no portion in the Hereafter; and surely evil is the price for which they sell their souls, if they but knew."*

*(2:102)*

Now, tell me in truth: did the shayaateen do anything worse than these two angels? Now, as we know, the evil shayaateen follow the orders of Satan, while the angels follow the orders of God—they don't have free will. So, to put it another way, has Satan done anything worse than God? God, who sent down from Heaven these two angels on a special, urgent mission with the specific task of teaching people magic. Why? So that they could learn how to split up a man from his wife and learn that which harms them and does not benefit them? If you say it is to test man, then what is the difference between God's testing and Satan's misleading? What makes one bad and the other good?

Who is the criminal here? The one who practiced magic or the one who incited and induced them to do so, when otherwise they wouldn't have—nay, couldn't have!

And what is the point of the angels saying: "We are only a temptation, so don't disbelieve." Does it mean they are not in any way responsible for what the people have done? Isn't that just like: "The likeness of Satan when he says to man, 'Disbelieve!' But when man disbelieves, he (Satan) says, 'I am innocent of what you have done!'" (59:16) What is the ruling on those who spread mischief in the Qur'ān? "And do not spread mischief in the land after it has been made good." (7:56)

Why would the angels teach people magic that can be used to split up a husband from his wife? What was the magic supposed to be used for? Getting the household chores done a bit quicker, like the "Sorcerer's Apprentice?" Couldn't God see it would only end badly? Of course, God is omniscient, so He knew people would use the magic to split apart couples that He has ordered to be joined, even though that is precisely what He really hates: "Those who… split apart that which God has ordered to be joined, and who spread mischief in the earth, they will be the losers." (2:27) In fact, He curses them and will send them to Hell. "Those who…split apart that which God has ordered to be joined, and who spread mischief in the earth, they are the ones who, upon them, be a curse, and for them will be the evil abode." (13:25) I am utterly baffled by these verses and don't know how they sneaked into the text of the Qur'ān. Even though, of course, the Mufassirun are able to find limitless meanings to it.

As for Satan, man created him to help him solve the problem of evil. The problem of a perfectly good God and a world that contains evil. The devil, in this case, becomes very much the other side of the coin of God. But it doesn't solve the problem, just as adding imperfections to God's perfections doesn't solve the problem. They only raise more problems. As for Satan, it is time we consigned him to antiquity where he belongs with other myths and legends that man invented.

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*God: the Compassionate, the Merciful:*

As we have seen, God is described with all the attributes of perfection, and amongst these is the attribute of Mercy. Indeed, God's very essence in the Qur'ān is described as mercy. He is the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate. In fact, he is more than that! He is the "Most Merciful of those who show mercy!" But, believe me when I say to you that, until now, I cannot understand what is meant by mercy as it is used in the Qur'ān.[190]

Yes, I understand the linguistic meaning of the word, but I cannot see how that meaning applies in any way at all to God. The word Mercy (رحمة) (in Arabic) is derived from the word womb (رحم), and so comes from the relationship of the baby to the womb, which is the most gentle, caring, tender, and loving relationship possible. As a result, it means loving care, tenderness, mercy, compassion, benevolence, and clemency. So is God truly "Raheem" in this sense? No! And a thousand times: no! Never mind being the "Most Merciful of those who show Mercy," as the Qur'ān says in its typically overblown style. In other words, He is supposed to be more merciful than you and me, or, as the Hadith says, "More merciful than a mother to her child."

The truth is that the meanest human (in fact, most animals and insects) are more merciful than God, who is anything but merciful. What is the evidence that He is merciful? I want real evidence, not words on paper. I already know that all the highest attributes, virtues, values, and characteristics that can occur to the mind are attributed to God on paper, but does that change reality in the slightest way? The strange thing is that we keep repeating the phrase, "God is more loving to our children than we are," while our children suffer and die daily due to hunger, disaster, and disease, which we would not want for our children even temporarily. We do not stop for a moment and think about what we are saying.

The word "Mercy" in its various forms appears 933 times in the Qur'ān. If we add synonyms of mercy, such as clemency (الرأفة), pity (الحنان), love (المحبة), and affection (الود), the number would reach well over a thousand. In other words, hardly a page of the Qur'ān is free from one or more mention of God's mercy towards man. However, does this great number actually mean anything at all? God says in the Qur'ān: "He has ordained on Himself mercy!" (6:6) So if God didn't ordain on Himself mercy, does that mean the cruelty, oppression, disease, and disasters that we see in the world would be worse?

What, then, is the meaning of mercy? I don't know. Perhaps it means the opposite of mercy: cruelty and oppression. For, indeed, the Qur'ān does contain words that have the opposite meaning to what they usually mean, such as "Thanna" (ظن), which means "doubt" but also "certainty," and "Ghabara" (غبر) which means to "go/pass," but also to "remain," and "Qurʿ" (قرء) which means "menstruating," as well as "not menstruating!"[191]

It is often said that what is meant by mercy in the Qur'ān is mercy in the next life, not in this life that isn't worth the wing of a gnat. It is said this world is temporary, while the next is the one that will last. He, Most High said: "And the next life is better and more lasting." (87:17) So this life is the life of testing and suffering: "Does man think that he will be left to say 'We believe' when they haven't yet been tested?" (29:2) In other words, does man think it's

[190]This is clearly illustrated by the fact the Qur'ān describes God as both Merciful and as torturing unbelievers in Hell. To apply the description of Mercy - never mind "Most Merciful of those who show Mercy" - to one who tortures is ridiculous beyond words. Mercy & Torture completely contradict each other - and this is without going into the fact that this torture is without end, nor that it is simply because they failed to believe in the right religion.

[191] These examples, along with others, were discussed in chapter 4, part 6: "Ambiguity in the Qur'ān."

enough to just declare that he believes and not be tested with hardship and suffering so that the truth of whether he truly believes or not can be exposed and made clear? For this world is the abode of testing man with affliction and hardship against which no-one will be successful, apart from the ones who bear it all patiently: "And We will certainly reward those who patiently persevere, according to the best of their actions." (16:96) Indeed, He will not allow the reward of those who are patient to be lost. Be patient, and your patience will be rewarded, for God is with the patient. They "…shall have fruit and whatever they want." (36:57)

Fine. But children are starving now. How do we feed them? What sort of test is this? Is the measure of virtue merely one's capacity for pain, suffering, and death? Is that a reasonable test? So it is said, "Be quiet! No complaining about the commandments of God. This is due to a wisdom of God that no-one knows but He, the Sublime, who knows best the matters of His creation. God knows and you don't know."

So we must be patient if we want a drop of water. For a drop of water in paradise is equal to the whole world and all it contains. And the righteous will not drink just any old water as in this temporary life; they will drink water mixed with camphor: "As to the Righteous, they shall drink of a cup mixed with camphor. A fountain from which the servants of God shall drink, which they make flow abundantly." (76:5-6) Of course, the camphor of Paradise is not the camphor of this life, which is used to wash the dead and keep moths away. Nor is there only camphor flavoured water—oh, no! There is also ginger flavoured water: "And they shall be given to drink from a cup mixed with ginger, from a spring in it called Salsabil." (76:17-18)

Though, and God knows best, it seems there will not be any Erksoos (Egyptian Liquorice drink), Tamarind, Sugar Cane, or Carob-bean drink, which are among my favourites, but which are, of course less delicious than camphor or ginger-flavoured Paradise water. "For that which is with God is better for the righteous."

There are also rivers that never cease flowing, that you can find everywhere in Paradise. Their abundance and great number is indicated by the fact that the Qur'ān mentions them in 35 verses. And these rivers don't just flow under Paradise; they also flow under the rooms of buildings in the palaces of paradise and above them: "But those who fear their Lord, they shall have rooms above which are more rooms built, under which rivers flow. A promise of God, and God does not fail in His promises." (39:20)

As for how these rivers run under rooms, that is something that God is keeping to Himself, Glory be to Him, Most High is He. For He can do whatever He wills. So don't persist with questioning and don't be amongst the ignorant. In any case, it seems these rivers don't spill out into the rooms since there aren't any verses that indicate that these rooms would turn into swimming pools, and God knows best.

Also, the rivers of Paradise are not just rivers of water. They are "rivers of pure, clean water," and there are also, "rivers of milk that don't change in taste, rivers of wine, delicious to those who drink, and rivers of pure honey." (47:15)

So what is the matter with you, wanting water, when the water of this life is temporary? Contaminated by harmful things, especially these days. Even if it is clean water, it is nothing compared to the water of the Eternal Garden, the dominion that never fades. So if you are thirsty in this life, be patient, for you will never be thirsty in the next life! This life is just a passing phase, while the next one is permanent. A few years and this life will pass, even if they are long years. So be content, be content! Your thirst will be quenched with all types of wonderful liquids, from camphor and ginger-flavoured water to milk, wine, and pure honey.

But the poor child is thirsty now, and all the rivers of Paradise will not quench one who is thirsty now. In fact, all this talk of drinks in Paradise has made him even thirstier. Despite all these reassurances of drinks in the next

life, because of his short-sightedness, he insists on crying and becoming weak with hunger and thirst! But do not fear, you will not die of hunger! For God says: "And there is no creature, except that it is upon God to provide sustenance for it." (11:6) Ah, but haven't you heard about our brothers at the other end of the Nile? Those poor people in southern Sudan who are dying of hunger at a rate of 115 to 120 per day, according to the UN?

No, that can't be. Man could die of any other cause, but not hunger. That is what the Qur'ān tells us. It is a promise from God that no creature will die of hunger. And man is merely a creature on Earth, so do not shy away from the plain truth! And even if one were to die of hunger, then they would die a martyr and would be brought on the Day of Judgment with the martyrs, pious, and prophets under the shade of the throne on the Day of Judgment. On the Day that there will be no shade but His shade. What a blessed company are they!

How foolish is man, and how quickly he forgets. When was God merciful? When has He ever been The Most Merciful of those who show mercy, except on paper or in the minds of deluded believers? Did He have mercy upon the children of Iraq,[192] who die every day of starvation? Did He have mercy on the poor people of Darfur whose skin is stuck to their bones and their eyes sunken so that they look like ghastly walking dead? Did He have mercy upon the children of Burma whose parents are unable to feed them, so they wander the streets searching garbage cans to find a scrap to put in their mouths? Every day, men, women, and children die of famine, disease, drought, and all forms of disaster without anyone there to shed a tear.

We don't even have to go far from home. Did God have mercy upon the children the Qur'ān itself says were buried alive because their parents couldn't afford to take care of them? God promised He would bear the responsibility of feeding them, for He said: "Don't kill your children for fear of poverty; We will give them sustenance, and yourselves." (17:31) When did He do that? After they died? He didn't provide their sustenance nor their parents' sustenance. Was this promise withdrawn for the children of the Arabs? Or is it a law that is for all times and all places?

I challenge you to look at the history of man since the earliest times and up until today and show me, amongst all the suffering and misery, where exactly is this mercy of God? The only thing you will notice is that the scale of suffering and pain has increased, and it will go on without God ever lifting a finger. If God was truly one who answers du'a, who responds to the supplicator and aids those who beseech Him, then we wouldn't see any oppression on the face of this earth. If justice were the inviolable law of the universe, then God would truly be merciful, loving, and compassionate, and would have fulfilled his promise: "And there is no creature, except that it is upon God to provide sustenance for it."

The Qur'ān says the Jews said. "The hand of God is tied." (5:64) And who can argue with that? For if it is not tied, then what is it? Also, have you noticed that poor street beggars don't like it when you say to them, "It's upon God," or "Insha'Allah?" That is because they have experienced the truth of the matter: if you don't give them anything, then God is surely not going to come up with the goods!

God created man, then threw him into the jaws of ferocious animals, stinging scorpions, and poisonous snakes. He has abandoned him on stormy seas and violent hurricanes. But it is as though all that is not enough, for He has followed it with bacteria and viruses that show no mercy. He gave animals and insects—nay, even some plants—weapons that protect it from attack. But to man, He gave only a mind which too easily succumbs to superstition and ignorance. Since we were barely distinguishable from our ape cousins, man's existence has been a daily battle to just see the next day. To kill before he was killed. Where is this fictitious mercy?

[192] To this list we could add the ongoing death and destruction in Gaza, Syria - and every other place where innocents have, and continue to, suffer and die.

The pure, unadulterated truth is that God doesn't care in the slightest about the pain and suffering of this world. But in order to absolve God from these tragedies that befall man, the believers lay the blame solely on man, and man's oppression of his fellows, and on corrupt regimes that do not protect us but allow people to take advantage of others. More than that, they make up all sorts of justifications and excuses to free God from anything to do with the tragic condition of man.

Fine! So what does God do then? Is He just a silent observer? Why did He create mankind as His deputy on this earth? "When your Lord said to the angels, 'I am going to create a deputy on Earth.'" (2:30) Why, if He knew that he would be an absent manager? That he would not, or could not, provide man's needs to fulfil the role? And, instead, he left the situation open for conflict and discord between one man and another? Why leave the evil people to corrupt His plans and purpose? Does that not indicate His plan is fundamentally flawed? That it hasn't been thought through enough? If it were a sound plan, no-one could derail it.

Weren't the angels right? Weren't they more foresighted than God when they made clear their reservations about this plan and asked Him with all due respect: "Are you going to make in it one who will spread corruption and shed blood?" (2:30) and so He shut them up in the manner that we in the East are very familiar with—one that cannot accept any opposition at all—when he said the mocking and belittling words: "I know that which you don't know!" (2:30) But, despite "knowing what they don't know," the predictions of the angels have come true.

Poor man. He is the top of the pyramid in God's plan, and at the bottom at the same time. Isn't he the most wretched of all creation?! God made everything beautifully, but when He came to man it seems He had become tired, and He didn't have enough energy left to complete the job properly in the way that would suit the pinnacle of creation, and so He can't help but fall far below the high standard expected of Him. For God created him in a hurry, and this is the result of haste. He said to him, "Be," and he was. But it would be better if He had waited until He had completed him properly. The Qur'ān says: "Man is created of haste." (21:37) Then God tosses him into this world despite being half-baked, and says, if it can be believed, that He has subjugated to him everything in the heavens and Earth: "And He has subjugated for you all that is in the heavens and the Earth, together." (45:13)

I have counted how many times the word "subjugated" appears in the Qur'ān in this meaning and it is repeated twenty-one times at least. Now this subjugation was done in the honour of man and his great position in the sight of God. But I can't help wondering: what would the state of man be had He not subjugated the world for him? The world is fairly hostile in places as it is. Could it really be much worse without making it extremely difficult for man to survive at all? I can see how the world could be much better subjugated for man, but I can't see how it could 'be much worse? And what would be the purpose of making the environment so hostile that we couldn't survive? Should we be grateful God didn't place us on the surface of Mercury or Pluto, but instead on a planet where we are able to meet the requirements to survive? What is the point of repeating so many times that He has "subjugated" the world for man? Wouldn't once have been enough?

When we look at parts of the world where there is a very hostile environment, extreme heat or cold, or we look at how the earth's plates collide and cause massive death and destruction through earthquakes and tsunamis, or when we consider hurricanes and tornados, droughts, floods and the many natural elements that cause all kinds of disasters, in what sense could we say the earth has been "subjugated" for us?

As for the heavens being subjugated for us, the reality is that most of the universe is far beyond the control of man. And is it true that God has subjugated the sun and the moon for us? "And He hath made subject to you the sun and the moon, both diligently pursuing their courses." (14:33) There are nine planets in our solar system and all of them receive light from the sun. Some of these planets also have more than one moon. Jupiter, for example, is a gas

giant that cannot sustain life. It has four large moons, but many smaller ones. Like all the planets, it receives light from the sun.

I wish I knew for whom, then, has the sun and the many moons of Jupiter been subjugated for? The light of the sun that falls on the surface of Earth is a tiny fraction of the sun's total light that falls on other planets in our solar system or just goes off into empty space. So what does "the sun has been subjugated for us" mean, when the sun's light is not exclusively for Earth?

All this talk in the Qur'ān about subjugating Heaven and Earth for man simply reveals the view of ancient cosmology, which mixed myth with the astronomy of Ptolomy, who considered the earth to be the centre of the universe, while the sun and planets all orbit round it. They imagined that the stars are small sprinkled lights, like chandeliers on the roof of this universe, when they are in fact massive suns, many much bigger than ours. No, this universe only has one sun, one moon, and one earth, and that is quite enough for this primitive, limited, and small universe, where everything is devoted to and focused on Earth. Now, in this view I can see that "subjugate for you" has a meaning. But in the real, vast, limitless universe that modern astronomy has revealed, with its countless galaxies and black holes, and what has been discovered of stars that cannot be seen without the most powerful telescopes, some near and some far, and radiation, cosmic dust, nebulae—I say as for this real, massive, complex, diverse, intricate universe where we and our own solar system are nothing but a grain of sand or less, I cannot see that "subjugated for us" has any real meaning at all!!

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*God is Near and Answers:*

The Qur'ān describes God as being the one who "answers" in several verses such as: "Indeed, my Lord is near and answers." (11:61) "If My servants ask you about Me, then (tell them) indeed I am near and answer the prayer of the supplicant when he calls on Me." (2:186) But just as I don't understand what "mercy" means in the Qur'ān, likewise I cannot understand the word "answers," unless it is one of those words in the Qur'ān that seem to mean the opposite of what they usually mean, in which case it would mean "doesn't answer," "is deaf to," "ignores," and "lets down." This is what the word "answers" means most of the time the Qur'ān. As for the remaining times, one might interpret it as pure coincidence, or due to the hard work, effort and perseverance of the person seeking God's answer. But whether it is the result of coincidence or effort, the supplicator thinks that what has happened is due to God making it happen and answering his prayer. So he praises God and thanks Him, even though God had nothing to do with it. I, myself, used to think this way—oh, how many times I praised and thanked God for what I told myself was the result of something God had done!

Despite the fact God in the Qur'ān warns us of those evil people who love to be praised for what they didn't do ("Do not think those who rejoice in what they have done and love that they should be praised for what they have not done… will be safe from the punishment") (3:188), there is no one in the entire universe who comes anywhere near the torrents of praise heaped upon God for "doing what he has not done!" Every day and every night, all around the world, religious believers praise and thank God for answering their particular prayers and responding to their individual requests. For this is what the Qur'ān tells us. God is near to us and answers the prayer of one who asks.

Even if it sometimes takes a bit of imagination to see it, or if it perhaps wasn't in the way we expected—no matter! For God knows best. This was better for us, anyway! God knows that which we know not.

In fact, we Muslims have invented a new type of praise that shows how devout we are, and that is to praise God for the disasters and afflictions that befall us! So when one of us is afflicted, injured, or loses a loved one, we say: "Praise be to God who no one other than He is praised for affliction!" How many times I praised God when something bad happened and encouraged my students to do the same in times of sickness and affliction, and until now they are still praising Him and immersed in remembrance of God!

God urges us many times in the Qur'ān to make Du'a: "Call upon Me and I will answer you!" (40:6) He promises us He will answer: 'If My servants ask about Me, (say) Indeed, I am near and answer the prayer of the one who calls on Me when he asks Me. So let them seek from and believe in Me so that they may be guided aright." (2:186) Especially when in great need, suffering adversity, hardship, or misfortune: "Is He not the one who answers the distressed one when he calls upon Him and removes the suffering?" (27:62) And Du'a must be directed at God alone: "Would you call upon other than God?… Nay, but to Him you call, and He will remove (the distress) which made you call upon Him, if He wills." (6:40-41)

Du'a is the link between the servant and his Lord: "Say: My Lord would not care for you if it wasn't for your du'a." (25:77) There is no-one more astray than he who calls on other than God: "And who is more astray than he who calls on other than God, such as will not answer him?" (46:5) So the idols that the polytheists direct their du'a to cannot hear their du'a, let alone answer it: "And those whom you call upon besides Him do not possess even the thin membrane of a date stone. If you call on them, they cannot hear your call, and if they could hear they will not answer you." (35:13-14) So there is no use, then, in calling upon the idols, because they cannot harm nor benefit: "Say: Call on those whom you assert besides Him; they have neither the power to remove your troubles from you nor to change them." (17:56) In the part of the Qur'ān where God is speaking about the cow that bani Isra'il worshipped, God asked them: "What! could they not see that it did not return to them a reply, and it did not control any harm or benefit for them?" (20:89)

What does this mean? The meaning is very clear, indeed! It is that the idols cannot answer du'a because they can't hear, feel, harm, or benefit. It is God and only God who answers du'a and harms or brings benefit. We must seek help and assistance from no one but Him alone! God Himself has ordered us to do this: "Is it other than God you call on… Nay, but to Him must you call!" (6:40-41) So he who calls on anyone or anything other than God has no hope of ever getting what he wants. But he who wants to get an answer and response to his du'a, then he must direct it to God.

Is this true? Does God really answer the du'a of the distressed? Does He really remove their suffering? You will find the answer with the widows, the bereaved, the oppressed, and the desolate. You will find the answer with the mother in Algeria who lost her mind after seeing her husband and children slaughtered in front of her eyes in the massacres there. You will find the answer with the innocents tortured in prisons of tyrants. Or with the desperate mothers of Gaza who beseech God every night to keep their children safe but are only answered with more slaughter. Can't God hear them? Can't He hear the howl as a father finds his son under the rubble of their house? Or see the tears that won't stop? All these people called on God, in sincere, devout du'a. If this verse was true ("Is He not the One who answers the distressed one when he calls upon Him and removes the suffering?") (27:62), then all this

wouldn't have happened to them. And, if not, then what is the meaning of His pledge to answer the du'a of the distressed? These people are amongst the most distressed and oppressed people, and they all believe in God and have prayed to Him to remove their suffering. So did God answer them as He promised? What is the difference between God and the idols in the following verse?

*"If you call on them they cannot hear your call, and if they could hear they will not answer you."*

*(35:14)*

God in the Qur'ān forbids you from calling on anyone other than Him. But if you call on Him, He doesn't respond. As though He is one of Abraham's idols[193], or the idols of the polytheists of Mecca. Can anyone tell me the difference between God and the idols when it comes to answering du'a? Can anyone tell me what is the point of the Qur'ān insisting we make du'a to God who promises to answer?

Yes, there's the odd example in the Qur'ān of God helping a few lucky servants and making a big show of it, rather like a publicity stunt or a magician pulling rabbits out of a hat to dazzle the eyes of his servants. Such as the boat that Moses' companion[194], under the revealed direction from God, makes a hole in. The boat belonged to some poor people who worked on the sea, so he damaged it so that the king wouldn't plunder it. But if God had the slightest interest or concern for the poor people of Earth, then there would be no need for this showmanship, since there would be no poor people.

Likewise, the two boys who had a pious father who left them a treasure under a wall that was in danger of collapsing. So God revealed to Moses' companion that he should repair the wall before it collapses so that the treasure is not revealed and stolen.[195] Yet how many pious men and women are oppressed and displaced—them and their children? How many orphans roam the streets, their bodies abused and their rights stolen?

Under this category falls also the story of Moses, who his mother bore and then placed in a basket and cast into the river, fearing the violence of Pharaoh, but God protected him and returned him to his mother.[196] While narrating these events, the Qur'ān says: "...And whosoever fears God and keeps his duty to Him, He will make a way for him to get out (from every difficulty). And He will provide him from (sources) he never could imagine. And whosoever puts his trust in God, then He will suffice him..." (Qur'ān 65:2-3)

In these and other verses, God has stipulated upon Himself two conditions of security that He will ensure: protection of rights and prevention of plunder and aggression. But if God cared in the slightest about the grief of a mother to her child, He would not have helped only the mother of Moses. He singled her out for help, but He has withheld his help from all other mothers who are grieving over their children who are suffering all types of afflictions, displacement, and misery.

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[193] Qur'ān 21:51-70 recounts the story of Abraham's people who worshipped idols. So Abraham broke them all except the largest. When the people accused Abraham, he replied: "No, this was done by this their biggest one! ask them, if they can speak intelligently!"

[194] One could also mention from the same narrative in the Qur'ān the story of the boy who Moses' companion killed because he was going to grow up to be a evil boy and would make his pious parents life a misery. God wanted to give them another good and pious son. Which raises the obvious question - why not give them a good son from the start and avoid having to kill anyone with all the distress that would inevitably cause to the parents - not to mention the boy who is being killed for crimes he has yet to commit.

[195] See: Sura al-Kahf (The Cave) 18:60-80.

[196] See: Sura Ta Ha 38-39.

How many orphans there are in Somalia and other parts of Africa with no father or mother to care for them as they struggle against hunger, thirst, and an early death? How many mothers in the Middle East cry out day and night to God in unbearable grief and sorrow, their hearts breaking for their sons and daughters? The Middle East, where the never-ending bloodshed and oppression is only equalled by the cries of innocents towards a deaf God…Why does God's promise to help those in adversity not extend to them?

These poor suffering people and orphans are part of a global tragedy that started since the birth of mankind into this world and it is repeated over and over again in front of our very eyes. But God is oblivious to it. So lucky are you, O mother of Moses! Be happy and consoled!

Who are the disobedient and insubordinate people the Qur'ān mentions, who were ungrateful for the blessing of God upon them? When He said: "They embarked on a boat, they called on God, making their devotion sincerely to Him; but when He delivered them safely to land, behold, they associate others (with Him)" (29:65) When was that? And who are these people, also: "And when a wave like mountains covers them, they call upon Allah, being sincere to Him in obedience, but when He brings them safe to the land, some of them compromise. None denies Our signs save every traitor ingrate." (31:32)

Who are those ones that God saved? I don't know, but I do know that numbers that cannot be counted drown at sea. Did they die because they didn't call on God, "making devotion sincerely to him?" Indeed, anyone in this position will wholeheartedly call on Him sincerely, especially women, children, the elderly, and the handicapped, who find themselves helpless.

Do you want to know who God saves? He saves those who are able to save themselves, who are able to swim: those who don't need anyone to save them. Although even they are sometimes overcome by the waves. So what do you think about the weak and frail? Let's say for the sake of argument that a large ship came to their rescue, which, of course, believers will say was sent by God. Can the ship rescue everyone thrown into the sea? They can only save those who managed to survive until they arrived. As for the rest, they just drown, or are eaten by sharks. In this case, it is just pure chance that is behind those who are saved—not God, who left the others to die without doing anything. And this only rarely happens. But despite that, those who are saved will always praise and thank God for saving them!

God always gets the credit when believers do anything. They willingly and happily ascribe their deliverance or success to him, believing it is due to His grace and favour. God is like the croupier who spins the roulette wheel. While the gamblers win or lose all, He never makes a loss. Believers pour praise and gratitude on God in sickness and in health. "Thank God; no-one but Him is praised for something bad!"

So if the one who is afflicted or suffers still thanks God, then what do you think about the one who succeeds? Shouldn't he thank God even more? These fortunate ones whom God has "answered" will increase their prayers and praise. They thank God day and night and express their gratitude through charity, sacrifices, and ever more closer adherence and observance of their religious duties, confident that this is the source of their success. How blessed are those who have been helped and are successful, for God does not answer any but the pious, god-fearing, and obedient servants. Upon them fall the blessings of their Lord and His mercy, they are the ones who are on the right path.

However, while God is "answering" those lucky ones, He is ignoring others. So if God never fails to answer His obedient servants, then those who are not answered cannot be pious enough. They must be sinful in some way. So not only do they suffer the misery of what has befallen them, but they suffer condemnation from others. They must be at fault, for it cannot be God. So what is their response? To redouble their efforts to be pious, obedient servants of God. Just like those who have been answered, they increase their prayers, praise, and thanks to God and ever more closely adhere to and observe their religious duties, hoping one day they will meet the conditions God requires for their prayers to be answered. And God is with the patient.

All the while, God is motionless on His throne above the 7th heaven. Praise is heaped at His feet like offerings to an idol, while He is oblivious to human suffering. To Him, there are no grieving mothers, apart from the mother of Moses. There are no desperate people calling for help apart from the companions of the ship. There are no orphans in need of protecting other than the children whose treasure lay under the wall. How marvellous is the compassion of God! How sensitive and tender are His feelings towards us! How generous and caring is He of the weak and oppressed. This is the reality of God.

Up-turned palms are raised to Him, imploring and pleading that He not leave a single sin but forgive it. Nor affliction but remove it. Nor need but fulfill it. Faces upturned to the heavens, tears streaming down cheeks, hearts bared and begging. But Heaven is unmoved by the misery of man, for a God who has the ability to remove suffering but refuses to is content with that suffering, happy to let it continue.

Du'a is the refuge of the defenceless and powerless who are unable help themselves. For he who is able to do something for himself will do it. But you will still find those of deep faith overloading God with their constant requests, seeking to add to the wealth he already has and to increase his success. Though, in many cases, the rich make du'a out of ritual and religious duty rather than due to needs of this world.

In reality, du'a is just talking to yourself. This is what millions do every day—and I used to be one of them. When we call on God, implore Him, seek His forgiveness and help, we are just talking to ourselves and appealing to ourselves. For that reason, du'a is a type of madness.

There are so many popular books available with formulaic du'as, religious chants and praise that have a ready market amongst the more simple-minded believers who love to recite them in gatherings in mosques and at Sufi meetings. So you will see them chanting them morning and night, swaying rhythmically as they do, bellowing out their du'a with pious intensity etched on their faces. Whenever I pass by such gatherings—especially halaqat al-Zikr—I feel great pity for them and lament their state and think to myself, "How sad it is that so much of human life is wasted waiting for God to answer!?"

One of the du'as that believers use to beseech God is one that it is impossible to achieve:

"O, God! Do not leave us a sin except that You forgive it, nor a debt except that You pay it, nor a sorrow except that You relieve it, nor an affliction except that You remove it, nor a sick person except that You cure him, nor one who is lost except that You bring him back, nor one who is let down except that You lift him up, nor a weak one except that You make him strong, nor a mad person except that You return his mind, nor an astray except that You guide him, nor a confused one except that You direct him, nor an absent one except that You return him, nor a drowning one except that You rescue him."

Believers also often finish du'as by calling on God to destroy their enemies, especially the Jews. It is as though God is only the God of Muslims and not the God of the rest of the human race:

"O, God, Give us victory over the oppressive Jews who are your enemies and enemies of the religion. O, God, disperse their unity and separate their assembly, destroy their buildings, and make orphans of their children and widows of their women, and make them and that which they own as booty for the Muslims…"

The list of du'as is long—very long. It never ends! But it doesn't matter, since God is on our side. Though it seems that, due to the great number of these du'a, God has decided not to reply to any of them, except the request for forgiveness, since I don't know whether He answers that request or not. Though I suspect He does, since it doesn't involve Him getting up from His throne. So, despite everything, we go on pleading with God while He is deaf to us and refuses to answer, making us look like fools so that Israel and its allies can laugh and poke fun at us.

Among the strangest of du'as are the ones that are made seeking God's help through the intercession of his beloved, dearest Muhammad, and his good character and behaviour. We pray that he be granted the power of intercession and grace, that he be brought on the Day of Resurrection in the praiseworthy status that God promised him. It is as though we are in constant fear that God would not fulfil his promise to him. For that reason, we constantly implore and beg God to grant Muhammad this blessed position, after every prayer, especially Friday prayer—all this in the hope that God will grant it. But I have a feeling this never-ending nagging may irritate God so much that He won't grant it just to spite us—even though it will be at the expense of His dearly beloved!

The promises of the Qur'ān and Gospels that God will answer your supplications never cease. Yet, whether Muslim or Christian, God never replies. Even though each believer will obsessively conform to whatever conditions they regard as necessary. The Qur'ān itself lays down some conditions: that the caller must be a pious servant of God. Every "divine" scripture is based on the principle that God loves His faithful. He is kind, compassionate, and loving towards them. But these are just on paper. Reality tells a quite different story.

How generous is He, Most High, in making promises, yet how frugal in fulfilling them. Believers of all faiths think that God loves them, but the facts show that God does not, unless misery, starvation, and disaster are love in His unique dictionary.

Of course, believers say, "It's a test!" Man must be put through a trial, an examination, so that God can expose what is in their heart, whether good or bad. And the results of the test will appear…when? After death, of course! But there is nothing more contemptible than this pathetic justification for the unbearable misery humanity suffers.[197]

They say the promises are not for this world; they will be realised in the next world! The poor wretches who suffer in this life swallow this fairy tale hook, line, and sinker. Nay, you will find the most pious of the pious of believers abstaining from the little pleasures this world offers and seeking suffering in the belief that it will increase their portion of the good things in the joyful next life that is eternal and unblemished by misery. Many also consider that afflictions in this life are punishments for misdeeds that are being paid for now so they will not have to suffer punishment in the next life. For the punishment of the next life is worse and more abiding!

[197] The argument that the suffering of this life is a test fails on several accounts. Why would a God who knows the result of the test need to test? Why would he need to prove or justify anything to his creation? Why would the next life be any worse were God to spare us the "test" of this life? Why is faith - believing something that lacks evidence - the most important requirement of this 'test'. Why is this test just about how much pain man can patiently - and faithfully - endure? Is that really the best measure of virtue & good character?

Some also say that the suffering of this world has nothing to do with God.[198] It is the result of the things that man does. Fine. But then what does God do? Is He content to just be a silent or impotent witness with nothing to do with this world or any influence? And if the condition for getting an answer is that the person must be pious and upright, then are all those who continue to suffer impious, thieves, and rogues? Isn't there, amongst them, at least some who deserve God's pity and compassion, seeing as He is the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate? What sin have those children committed that has resulted in God ignoring their pleas to save them from starvation and abuse? Where is the promise that God has made incumbent upon Himself in the Qur'ān when He said: "And how many a living creature that does not carry its sustenance: It is God who provides for it, as well as for you." (29:60) And: "There is no living creature in the earth but upon God lies the responsibility of providing its sustenance." (11:6) And: "Who listens to the (soul) distressed when it calls on Him, and Who relieves its suffering." (27:62)

Tell me, what is the difference between the existence of God and the non-existence of God?

If God doesn't exist, would the world, with all its troubles, misery, and suffering, be any worse than it is now? Tell me honestly.

❖

*God is the Best of Sustainers:*

God in the Qur'ān guarantees to provide sustenance for His servants. In fact, God in the Qur'ān isn't simply the provider (الرازق), but is The All-Sustaining Provider, الرَزَّاق- an emphatic form of الرازق in the usual hyperbolic style of the Qur'ān that throws out statements without the slightest sense of responsibility nor consequence, like braggarts and boasters do when they make all sorts of grand claims. But when you actually need them to do something, you discover all their big-talk was just hot air.

In the Qur'ān, God takes the polytheists of Mecca to task over the fact that "They worship other than God, that which cannot provide sustenance for them nor do anything." (16:73) But can God provide sustenance? How about the poor and destitute? Does God provide for them? Or has He left them and their children wandering from dustbin to dustbin? If we ask the religious scholars about the fate of these poor wretches, they say—and the answer is

[198] Muslims, Christians and those of other faiths have all sorts of arguments to counter the 'problem of evil' - perhaps the most common is that God allows suffering & misery for a reason & wisdom that we can either not understand or that is not explained to us - for whatever reason. The problem with this explanation is that since we don't know what this wise and wonderful purpose is, then how do we know it really exists? Believers will then say we must take it on trust. But again, what reason do we have to trust there is a wise and wonderful reason? Scriptures? The Qur'ān? The Bible? The God in those scriptures hardly inspires one to trust he has a wise reason

always ready on the tip of their tongues—that it is either because of what their hands have committed, or it is a test from God to see which of them is best in action. But then, one could say that about so-called false Gods and idols that the polytheists worship: that human suffering is either because they offended the idols or the idols are testing them to see who is best in action. The scholars will laugh and say that is just sophistry. Then why isn't what they are saying just sophistry? The truth is that both are just sophistry and they are dodging the issue in order to protect faith.

*"And how many a living creature that does not carry its sustenance: It is God who provides for it, as well as for you."*

*(29:60)*

Do you know how God provides for it? By feeding it another poor creature, who also "does not carry its sustenance," and is no less hungry than the other. Is this really providing sustenance? Or is this just play with words and insulting our intelligence?

This reminds me of a Hadith of the prophet: "If you truly relied upon God as He should be relied upon, He would provide for your sustenance just as He provides for the bird who goes hungry then returns full." No doubt because it found some insects or worms to eat. So relying on God means nothing more than eat or be eaten. Does God "provide" sustenance in any other way?

Something similar to this is related in the Gospel of Matthew where Jesus said: "Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear… Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?"[199]

I don't know which is worse: a God who can't provide sustenance, or a God who is able but chooses not to.

Even those servants close to Him are neglected, and I am reminded of what is related in the Torah, which the Qur'ān describes as guidance and light: "Indeed, We have sent down the Torah, in which is guidance and light." (5:44) It has been said that Moses stayed on the mountain for forty nights without food or water.[200] This is how God looks after his guests. Even though the limit for most human beings to go without food is about three weeks, and the limit to go without water is seven days. But, no doubt, Moses received enough spiritual food and water from talking to God to keep him alive until he could come down and get some real food and water—though, unfortunately, he may have had to deal with that whole golden calf business first.

Many of God's pious servants die while making pilgrimage to His holy house. Fires in tents are common, as are crushes and stampedes, as well as other calamities that befall God's guests every year. Though they die as martyrs in the most blessed sanctuary, and so God is, in fact, honouring them and raising them in status. Are they not the guests of the Most Merciful? Good news: you shall have paradise! In it, you can go wherever you wish. "They shall not hear vain or sinful language, only the saying: "Peace! Peace." (56:25-26)

God does, however, feed those who don't need Him to feed them.[201] He feeds the rich, the powerful, the corrupt, princes an kings, swindlers and tyrants and their entourage and sycophants. As for the rest, He couldn't care less. That is His will, Most High is He, and no-one has the right to object: "Is it they who would portion out the Mercy of thy Lord? It is We Who portion out between them their livelihood in the life of this world: and We raise

[199] Gospel of Matthew 6:25-26.
[200] See: Deuteronomy 9:9-18.
[201] This reminds me of the hadith where Umar found the Prophet sleeping on the floor in his sparse room and complained that rulers of Rome and Persia enjoyed luxurious living while the prophet live like this. The prophet replied; "Don't you like that they choose this world and we choose the Hereafter?" [Al-Bukhari].

some of them above others in rank, so that some of them may take others in subjection." (43:32) So it is God who has given us our place in the world, whether prince or pauper, judge or jester. God alone has the right to do whatever He wants and no-one has the right to question it: "Glory be to God, Lord of the throne, above what they attribute (to Him). He cannot be questioned about what He does!" (21:22-23) He knows best what's good for His servants: "God has favoured some of you above others in sustenance. Now those who are more favoured will by no means hand over their provision to those (slaves) whom their right hands possess so that they would be equal with them therein." (16:71) "God knows and you don't know." (24:19)

For it is God who gives and withholds, raises and humiliates, He is all-powerful: "Indeed, your Lord provides sustenance in abundance for whomever He wants and restricts it (upon whomever He wants). He is all-knowing and all-seeing." (17:30) It is not done according to your vain desires, nor the vain desires of people like you who only understand the superficial nature of this life, for if God was to give everyone their sustenance in abundance, they would transgress against each other:

*"Were God to provide sustenance for His servants in abundance, they would transgress in the land, so He apportions a fixed measure according to what He wishes. Indeed, He is all-experienced and all-seeing about His servants."*

*(42:27)*

So the wisdom of God and His foresight demands that He must not provide sustenance for His servants in abundance so that they won't transgress against each other or spread corruption. Thus we see this world is just fine. There is no conflict, or iniquity, no wars over resources. No corruption in the earth and no man transgresses against another due to the restricting of sustenance by God, which prevents that. If anyone sees anything to the contrary, then his eyes must be deceiving him.

It appears that the rampant corruption and iniquity in this world hasn't yet reached the ears of our Lord. Unfortunately, we may have to wait a thousand years before it reaches His hearing because "He regulates affairs from Heaven to the earth, which then ascends to Him in a day the measure of a thousand years of what you count." (32:5) Although, perhaps, this news has begun to filter through after only four centuries, in which case He will need to forward it to the relevant committees for consideration so that they can publish reports about it. Then, on the basis of these reports, He, Most High, can issue His final ruling. I am confident that His ruling will be a positive one because it is not acceptable nor reasonable to leave us like this, blundering around struggling to secure food, water, medicine, and the most basic requirements of life for us and our children when He possesses the "Treasures of the Heavens and Earth!" (63:7)

It is extremely unfortunate that neither we nor our children's children will get to see the outcome of these reports because we will have to wait another day of the days of our Lord before the arrival of instructions regarding the sustenance of the people of Earth. Then, the angels shall carry out these instructions to the letter.

There are two types of days with God: one whose measure is only a thousand years, and another type (and this is the frightening thing) whose measure is fifty-thousand years! "The angels and the spirit[202] ascend unto Him in a Day the measure of which is fifty-thousand years." In which case, we will have to wait five hundred centuries before the news of the corruption in the land reaches our Lord's ears! Then five-hundred more before we receive the instructions from Him, Most High. But I am hopeful it will be first type of days, as I am a strong optimist. For if one

[202] The Qur'ān contains many ambiguous and cryptic references that the mufassirun are at a complete loss to explain. The word "The Spirit" in this verse is an example. Ibn Kathir relates in his tafseer on this verse: "it is a creation from the creation of God who look like humans, but are not humans… it is possible it means Gabriel… and it is possible it's a collective noun for the souls of humans, because when they die they are taken up to heaven as is related in hadith… "

thinks the best, then they will find it with God, while hastiness is from Shaytan! Perhaps these two verses fall under the category of The Abrogater and the Abrogated. So the first one abrogates the second one, and this is what I hope is the case. Or, perhaps, the second abrogates the first, in which case I seek refuge in God!

The truth is that, up until now, I do not understand this verse: "Were God to provide sustenance for His servants in abundance, they would transgress in the land…" (42:27)

Is everything we see in the world of corruption, spreading mischief, oppression and aggression, not "transgression" And why do we have police, soldiers, laws, courts, and prisons if not to try and control the "transgression" of man against man?

Has God forgotten the wars and conflicts between peoples and nations over food, water, and other resources? The colonisation and appropriation of other people's resources that has gone on throughout history? If there was justice and a fair distribution of wealth and resources, then the verse would be true and there would not be any oppression or aggression and no need for laws, courts, and police. Or, perhaps, all that we see of transgression is not really transgression, in the sense of "God has told the truth, but your brother's stomach lies!"

There can be no opposition to what God decides, for He is: "The Possessor of the Majestic Throne, the Doer of everything He wants." (85:15-16) And why not, since: "He is the Conqueror above His servants and He is the Wise, the Expert." (6:18) "He is not to be questioned about what He does, but they are to be questioned." (21:23)

God, Most High, wants resources to be monopolised by a fortunate minority. Why? Believe it or not, it is so that corruption does not spread in the world! As for what we see on Earth of corruption as a result of this monopolising, inequality, and discrimination—that isn't corruption. Call it anything, but not corruption, for He is not to be questioned, and we are not to oppose his decisions.

The only thing God has done to rectify this iniquity—at least on a superficial level—is to encourage the fortunate ones to be generous with some of the crumbs from their tables to give to the poor and destitute, even though He knew in advance this is not nearly enough, and many won't give anything at all.

So He, Most High, has sought to repair matters by making it compulsory upon them to give a specific portion to the poor: "And in their wealth is a portion that is the right of the needy and deprived." (51:19) He threatened them with dire consequences and all sorts of severe retribution—but not in this world. No, in the next world, only. As for this world, no harm will touch them: "Those who hoard up gold and silver and do not spend it in God's way, give tidings to them a painful chastisement. On the Day when it (the gold and silver) shall be heated in the Fire of Hell, their foreheads and their sides and their backs shall be branded with it. This is what you hoarded up for yourselves, so taste what you hoarded up!" (9:34-35) But those who give money are promised great reward and all sorts of comforts and pleasure—in the next life, of course. Not in this life. "Those who spend their wealth in the path of God, and do not follow up what they have given with reproach or injury, they shall have their reward from their Lord, and they shall have no fear nor shall they grieve." (2:262)

So charity and doing good will never be lost with God: "Indeed, We suffer not the reward of one who does a good work to be lost." (18:30) By doing good works, man is doing good to himself for the good work, as whether it is charity or other good deeds, they come back to the person who did it. Just as doing evil comes back, also: "If you do good, you do good for your own souls, and if you do evil, it is for them (your own souls)." (17:7)

While earnings from business in this life are exposed to loss as well as profit, those who give in charity make a business transaction with God, which never loses: "Indeed, those who spend of the sustenance We provide for them, both secretly and openly, they look forward to a commerce that will never fail." (35:29) They will have the good news of Paradise: "As for he who gives (in charity) and fears God and believes in goodness, We will make smooth for him the path to bliss." (92:5-7)

This sort of postponement is something that appears frequently in the Qur'ān. God in the Qur'ān never commits Himself to anything in this world. If He does promise something in this world, then it is in general, vague language that can have multiple interpretations and are more like riddles and puzzles than promises. If any of it actually happens then it is pure coincidence—but, oh, how happy is chance when it coincides with what you want!

Since God created mankind on this earth, there have been "rich" and "poor." The rich were enjoined to give to the poor, but they just became arrogant, imperious, miserly, and tight-fisted. For when selfish greed overtakes one, then anything goes: "Spend in charity for the benefit of your own soul and whoever is spared the greediness of his soul, they are the successful." (64:16) But these pleas fall on deaf ears.

God placed sharp differences between his creation. He has obliged you and I and others like us from amongst his meek servants to be kind and charitable to the poor as much as we can after the rich and powerful fail to help them. They shall have the Fire of Hell, and what a terrible abode it is! But, of course, that is in the next life, only. As for this life, don't you dare look at what they have, seeking the pleasures of this life, for the next life is better and more lasting: "Do not stretch your eyes after that with which We have provided different classes of them of the splendour of this world's life so that We may test them; and the sustenance (given) by your Lord is better and more lasting." (20:131)

It's as though this rich elite are His dear loved ones, His sons, His pampered ones. They constitute 10% of the population of this world and yet own 85% of the world's wealth. God has indeed bestowed an abundance of sustenance upon them: He has heaped money and wealth on them and given them to eat of all the good things the earth produces. He has given them their every desire. If you try to count the blessings of God upon them, you will not be able to count them, yet they are ungrateful for the blessings and turn their backs, so God gives them more blessings as a test for them, luring them by giving them more and more to…who knows where. "As for those who disbelieve, We gradually lure them on from whence they know not." (7:182 & 68:44)[203]

"With God are the treasures of heavens and Earth." (63:7) He grants it to whomever He wants from amongst His servants, for He knows best where to shower the contents of His treasure stores: "Is it they who would portion out the Mercy of thy Lord? It is We Who portion out between them their livelihood in the life of this world, and We raise some of them above others in ranks so that some may command work from others. But the Mercy of thy Lord is better than the (wealth) which they amass." (43:32)

"Do not covet those things in which Allah hath bestowed His gifts more freely on some of you than on others." (4:32) Because God's wisdom demands that there be huge disparity in sustenance amongst humanity: "If God wanted, He could have made you a single community, but (He didn't) so that He can test you in what He has given

[203] Many of God's "tests" are little more than entrapment. Create a flawed creature, then place temptation in front of him. Were the poor to be in the rich man's place, would they behave differently? And if God is keeping them poor so wealth doesn't corrupt them, then why not do that with the rich? Is it fair to reward one and punish the other when it is God's doing that determined how they would behave? The big question, however, is to what extent are we truly responsible for our behaviour? Inherited genes & brain structures influence our behaviour, along with environment and socialisation. Although we are aware of our actions and appear to have free choice, there are underlying forces we are not conscious of, that deeply influence our behaviour. It is far from certain to what degree free-will - in a literal sense - exists. At best it is limited, at worst it is simply an illusion. God's "tests" and "punishments" are already flawed and cruelly excessive - but in view of the limited nature of "free-will" - they are also pointless.

(each of) you. So race each other in good works. To God you will all return." (5:48) Giving everyone sustenance in abundance is the cause of corruption and transgression according to the logic of the Qur'ān. So, for that reason, and to impose upon us more tricks and tests, God has held it back and restricted it to the lucky few so there won't be any corruption or transgression: "Were God to provide sustenance for His servants in abundance, they would transgress in the land, so He apportions a fixed measure according to what He wishes. Indeed, He is all-experienced and all-seeing about His servants." (42:27)

Wealth is a temptation, and so, for that reason, God has not distributed it fairly, because He knows what's best for us: "Were it not for the fear that all mankind would become one community [of disbelievers], We would have made for those who disbelieve in the Merciful God houses with roofs of silver and gold, and stairways by which they go to upper chambers, and their doors and their couches on which they recline (all of silver and gold). But all this is merely a provision of this worldly life; and the Hereafter with your Lord is for the righteous." (43:33-35)

Is this true? Will providing abundant sustenance for human beings truly cause them to become corrupt and transgress? Does poverty and misery prevent one from corruption or transgression? Is the Qur'ān an enemy of the Left and self-sufficiency? Even desiring a better life is forbidden in the Qur'ān. Strange logic and mysterious wisdom…but God knows, and you don't know!

As for the houses of the unbelievers that we just saw described in Sura al-Zukhruf (houses with roofs of silver and gold, and stairways by which they go to upper chambers, and their doors and their couches on which they recline…), these houses that God said He wouldn't make for the disbelievers because He "feared that all mankind would become one community [of disbelievers]," these houses are nothing compared the palaces of the disbelievers today. Palaces so vast you cannot count the rooms. Palaces with pools, gyms, stables, and helicopter ports. Palaces with the latest control of software technology and multi-media entertainment. Palaces with priceless ornaments and works of art everywhere you turn, and luxuries and comforts you cannot imagine. The houses that God describes in the Qur'ān are nothing compared to the palaces of today, belonging to the rich and powerful all around the world. The Qur'ān describes these magnificent houses as though they were an unattainable dream, and says God wouldn't make such things because He "feared that all mankind would become one community [of disbelievers]." He feared that we would all become unbelievers.

Yet, the truth is that their palaces have far exceeded God's specifications, Glory be to Him, without any of the pitfalls that He, Most High, feared would happen. People haven't all become unbelievers. In fact, there are more Muslims now than at the time of the prophet—proportionally, as well as, of course, in total. Also, people haven't become one single nation. On the contrary, the rich have gotten richer and the poor poorer. So even though God said He didn't want unbelievers to have amazing houses beyond the wildest dreams of people at that time, it has happened, and more, whether God wanted it or not. Despite this, none of the evil consequences that He feared have happened. These evil consequences that the Qur'ān invents are nothing but excuses to cover up God's failure to remove man's suffering. It's an excuse that gives a free hand to the fat cats, whether they be religious leaders, politicians, or any other group that finds religion a useful tool to control people. We, however, must be content with the crumbs that fall to us from their tables.

There are so many things in this world that makes one doubt the existence of a "Most-Merciful" and a "thousand Most Mercifuls" on top of that! The "problem of evil" is only one of them. But faith impairs our critical

ability and judgment to the extent that some consider a bitter broth to be delicious drink and a meagre crumb a sumptuous feast for which we cannot thank God enough. There is also the promise of the life to come and all the joys and pleasures that await us there to help keep our resolve strong.

Indeed, the most happy promise, the promise of Heaven, is not just to console and delight the naïve; rather, this promise has occupied philosophers and thinkers throughout the ages. They have theorised about it, researched every corner of it, deliberated over its meanings, and employed all their abilities to establish its reality. Why? Because they are like the the rest of God's servants. They, too, have a strong personal interest in the realisation of this promise and enjoying its delights. In this aspect, they agree with all other religions, despite differing in minor details and particulars.

Yes, God has chosen for mankind a life of humiliation and destitution so that people won't disbelieve in "The Merciful." Then, in order to correct that which is corrupt, straighten that which is bent, and remedy the deficiency that He created, He has ordered us to give to the poor and made it compulsory to help them, as though we are responsible for the failings of His plan, not He who possesses "the treasures of the heavens and the earth." And if we don't, then woe to us! Thus the ball is thrown in our court while God shirks His responsibility to the creatures He chose to create. He doesn't want to make people one nation, enjoying a comfortable life with the absence of exploitation. The polytheists of Mecca refused to feed the poor or be generous to them or spend on them and they gave a compelling reason: "When it is said to them, 'spend from the sustenance God has given you,' those who disbelieve say to those who believe: 'Shall we feed the one who, if God had willed, He could have fed him?!'" (36:45-46) Now, while one can fault their humanity, one cannot fault their reasoning. As usual, God in the Qur'ān doesn't respond to them; no, He suffices with simply recording their objection as a way to mock, belittle, and reject what they say, without actually offering any proper reason why they are wrong. He then goes on to firmly enshrine inequality and division amongst mankind.

So God has restricted the comfortable life to a fortunate few and divided the rest of mankind into different classes and factions with empty stomachs, pale faces, sunken eyes and protruding bones, then cast them into never-ending whirlpools of war and conflicts over land, resources, and food. So a world of justice, comfort, and plenty is a bad thing, while poverty, begging, and destitution is a good thing—and this is so that people don't disbelieve in The Merciful. Bravo to the Merciful and those who disbelieve! Blessed are the wrongdoers and tyrants!

Heaven colludes with the earth to cheat mankind and cause one man to extort from another, and create inequalities between a man and his fellow so that man will not disbelieve in "The Merciful." It's for the benefit of man, if you can believe that! As for inequality, discrimination, and walking skeletons, this is all a test to purify and examine hearts: "To test you so that we know who are the ones who strive (in God's path) and who are patient," although God knows in advance who will pass the tests without needing to subject them to these cruelties. (31:47) As for the fat cats who disbelieve in the Merciful, "Gradually, We lure them on from whence they know not." (7:182 and 68:44) This is the logic of the Qur'ān. Poor mankind; my heart breaks for us.

"God has favoured some of you above others in provision. Now those who are more favoured do not give away their sustenance to those whom their right hands possess, so as to be equal in that respect, is it then the favour of God which they deny?" (16:71) So God has favoured a lucky minority and tossed crumbs to the rest. "And He has given you sustenance from all the wholesome things!" (16:72) By no means is this true! God has not given all of us this. No, He has allowed the fat cats to monopolise it and made us their servants. If they feel like it, they throw us a scrap, but if not, then praise be to God, who is the only One praised for something bad!

And what wholesome things are these when, no sooner are they ripe, huge armies of insects, maggots, and bugs flock to them?! If it were true that God created these wholesome foods just for us[204] to the exclusion of the rest of the creatures, then they would be free from such pests. If God does, as He claims, feed us these things, then He would protect them from spoiling or being eaten. Isn't the truth of the matter that others share with us in these things? If God wants us to believe that He truly created the good things for us, why didn't He bestow them only on humans so we can see that He truly did create everything just for us, as He claims? Who knows? Perhaps He tells the maggots, insects, and other animals that feed on the good things that He that made these things just for them. Perhaps these poor little creatures believe it. If only we could speak to them like Sulayman was able to speak to the birds, then we could divide things between us.

Yet, despite all this, God says in the clear-meaning verses: "He gives you everything you ask for. But if you count the favours of God, never will you be able to number them. Verily, man is given up to injustice and ingratitude." (14:34) God gives us everything we ask for, but man is ungrateful for the gifts of God according to Him, Most Sublime: "Is it the blessing of God that you deny?" (16:70) God gives us everything we ask for? Really? He gives the few fat-cats everything they ask for, but as for the rest of us hapless chumps, He just enslaves us to a lifetime of service to those fat cats who don't believe in Him: "We have raised some above others in rank so that some of them may take others as subservient to them." (43:32)

We are at their mercy. If they give us a little, we thank God, but if they don't give us anything, we have no recourse other than to confide our misery to God, for there is no barrier between God and His oppressed servant.[205] Although, barrier or no barrier, the result is the same: we are abandoned to the fate God has ordained for us: "It is We who apportion between them their livelihoods in this life." (43:32)

These fat cats are our rulers and bosses, our sultans and kings; they monopolise power and authority throughout our lives and it is our religious duty to obey them and never rebel against them: "O, ye who believe! Obey God, and obey the messenger, and those in authority from among you." (4:59)

In any case, 'The things that you worship besides God have no power to give you sustenance. So seek sustenance from God." Yet when We ask God for sustenance, He doesn't answer us. So what is the difference between Him and that which they worship besides Him? "Say who gives you sustenance from the heaven and the earth?" (10:31) Well, let me reply: "No one!" Or, at the very least, "I don't know!" For experience, evidence, and reality of life all point to the conclusion that we feed ourselves. Through our own efforts and hard work, and if circumstances are so bad that we aren't able to feed ourselves, then we either die or emigrate to another country.

Indeed, the famines that grip much of the third world are not far from us. As for God, He has other things that occupy Him apart from us. Did He not say, "Indeed, the creation of the heavens and Earth is a greater (matter) than the creation of mankind?" (40:57) So mountains are more important than we are, for God is more concerned with size than substance. We hear a lot about the treasures of God: "With God are the treasures of Heaven and Earth." (63:7) But they are just to pamper His spoiled favourites, while he ignores the poor, the starving, and the destitute—as a test, of course, so that He can expose the wicked ones who dare object or oppose His wisdom, for: "He is not to be questioned about what He does, but it is they who will be questioned." (21:23)

[204] Islam, like Christianity and other religions, places man at the centre of the universe. All creation is for him.
[205] A reference to the prophetic hadith: "Fear the prayer of the oppressed one, for between it and God there is no barrier."

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*There is no Victory Except from God:*

May God curse the polytheists, for "They have taken gods other than He, in order that they be given victory, but they are not able to give them victory." (36:74-75)

It is God alone who is able to do that. But is this true? Today we have believing Muslims who have taken the one true God as their god, ascribing no partner to Him, in order that they may be given victory, yet does God help us achieve victory. Even at the prophet's time, did God give the Muslims victory in the battle of Uhud? No, and that was at the time of the prophet, with him present! But that didn't make the slightest difference, for neither God nor many gods is able to give victory to one who is going to lose, even if they are helpers to each other. God is only able to give victory to the one who is going to win: those who are not in need of help to achieve victory. Not from God, idols, or humans. This verse also appears in another form: "Why did those whom they had chosen for gods as a way of approach (unto God) not help them? Nay, but they did fail them utterly. And that was their lie, and what they used to invent." (46:28)

But, by the same token, why didn't God help those who worshipped Him alone, associating no partner with Him, at the battle of Uhud, or today in the many battles we have fought against Israel? Nay, but He did fail them utterly, just as the idols failed the polytheists. So why didn't He help them to victory if victory really does come from Him?

As always, God has His excuses, and if He hasn't got excuses, then we give Him excuses. In the battle of Hunayn, which the Muslims eventually won, the Muslims were at first being defeated and began to flee. The Qur'ān explains why God didn't help the Muslims. It was because the Muslims were pleased at their great numbers, that's why! "Assuredly, God has helped you in many battlefields. While, on the day of Hunayn, behold! You were pleased at your great numbers. But it didn't profit you at all, and (instead) the earth became narrow upon you, despite its spaciousness. Then you turned back in flight." (9:25)

So being pleased with great numbers is the reason for their defeat, then. Have you seen an excuse for a defeat more strange than this one? Or more ridiculous? Being pleased at the great number is being pleased with oneself, and being pleased with oneself is a crime that cannot be forgiven. Who said? The Lord of the Worlds. Is that reasonable? For the believer, anything is reasonable, as long as it says so in the Qur'ān.

The Muslims only gained victory after that when God sent the angels down: "Then Allah sent down His tranquility upon His messenger and upon the believers, and sent down hosts which you did not see, and chastised those who disbelieved, and that is the reward of the unbelievers." (9:26)

Do you see how the Qur'ān undermines man's self-confidence and causes him to lose hope in his own abilities? Do you see how it erodes his self-belief and crushes his spirit, and how it compels man to instead place all

his hopes and faith in something else that cannot hurt nor benefit? Do you see the total denial of human endeavour and how man is robbed of all competency, so that he becomes weak and fearful unless he is clinging to God's hand?

God in the Qur'ān wants to wipe out anything called "I" and obliterate any trace of "me," so that He alone is the only One who can do anything or can have any effect, without any consideration for His "Deputy" (خليفة) on Earth, which is supposed to be the pinnacle of creation, and yet is robbed of any agency of his own and reduced to a slave who "hears and obeys." Perhaps God forgot that He asked the angels to bow down to Him. God in the Qur'ān only wants to humiliate man and crush him and to kill off any sense of pride and dignity. He wants from him pure and total slavish servitude. Nay! That was why God created him: "And We have not created Man and Jinn, except that they worship[206] Me." (51:56) Slavery is slavery, whether it is to God or to man or to an idol, because, in every case, slavery destroys the spirit and robs man of his humanity.

The strange thing is that all the verses of the Qur'ān have this theme: the theme of complete slavery to God, when God alone makes everything happen. Man is stripped of any power to do or change anything. A typical example of God's depreciation of man's efforts and crushing of his will is in His saying, Most High, concerning the victory at Badr: "You did not kill them, but God killed them, and you didn't shoot the arrows when you shot, but God shot them." (8:17)

The Muslims had sacrificed their lives, their homes, their sons, and everything they posess. Yet, despite that, they cannot take any credit for this victory. All the credit goes to God, and those poor wretches fall for it, for blind faith is stronger than self-belief.

Yes, they believe that God gave them victory. They believe that, were it not for God's help, and if it were not for the drama of the green-turbaned[207] angels that swooped down to save them, they would have turned and fled in defeat. But God aided them with His victory and sent them armies they couldn't see so that the word of God should be highest and the word of those who disbelieve the lowest:

*"Allah had helped you at Badr, when ye were a contemptible little force; then fear Allah, that you may show your gratitude. Remember, you said to the Faithful, 'Is it not enough for you that Allah should help you with three thousand angels, sent down?' Nay, but if you remain firm, and act aright, even if the enemy should rush here on you suddenly, your Lord would help you with five thousand angels, making a terrific onslaught. Allah made it but a message of hope for you, and an assurance to your hearts. There is no help except from Allah. The Exalted, the Wise."*

*(3:123-126)*

The truth is that the battle of Badr was won through resolve, endeavor, and sacrifice. It is one of the decisive moments that decided the fate of Islam. But, despite this, God in the Qur'ān wants us to believe that it is He alone who gave the Muslims victory. Instead of appreciating the great efforts made by the Muslims, He stamps all over it with His two feet so as to kill of any notion of autonomy; they are turned into puppets that He moves. So if they are victorious, then it is by His grace and His mercy! For there is no victory except from Him. As for their efforts,

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[206] It is important here to note that the verb the Qur'ān always uses for "worship" is: عبد يعبد which is worship as a slave, and the word "slave" (عبد) comes from this verb.
[207] See: Al-Sira Al-Halabiya by Burhan al-din al-Halabi, Volume 2, p. 241. Quote: "During the battle of Badr, the angels wore white turbans whose ends they let hang down their backs, except Gabriel who wore a yellow turban and some say; red. Some say they wore green turbans, some wore yellow turbans, some wore red turbans and some wore white turbans and some wore black turbans, so there is no contradiction. It is mentioned that the turban worn by Gabriel - upon who be peace - when he drowned Pharaoh, was black."

endeavours, and striving, these are insignificant things. On the contrary, it is they who must show appreciation and gratitude to Him, since He did them the favour of granting them victory, while they are nothing without Him.

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Note the word "contemptible" (أذلة) in the last verse. Read the verse again. Also, the words, "that you may show your gratitude." They undermine the self-worth and belittle those who just achieved an extraordinary victory. However, the Muslims meekly affirm God's bounty upon them: "Indeed, God is full of bounty to mankind, but most of them do not give thanks." (10:60)

It was God who gave the Egyptians victory against the Mongols in the battle of 'Ain Jalut[208], and it was God who gave Saladin victory against the crusaders. In fact, God is behind every victory throughout history, including non-Muslim victories. So He gave victory to the Europeans during their period of colonial expansion. It was God who gave victory to the allies against Hitler. It was God who gave America victory against Japan in Hiroshima. It is God who gave Israel victory over us in the June War[209] and it is God who gave us victory in the October War.

As for human efforts and endeavour and scientific progress and the huge machines of war and atomic bombs that were dropped on Japan—all that is inconsequential. The only thing that matters is the support and aid from God. So God has nothing to do other than cause so-and-so to be subjugated by so-and-so, and give victory to so-and-so at the expense of so-and-so. We are merely pawns in God's chess game.

I wonder, could God have helped the Africans against the European colonial powers? Or the Native Americans against the settlers? Is God able to help us today against Israel? I wonder why He didn't give us victory against them if it is true what it says in the previous verse: "There is no victory except from God!"

If it is true that victory rests upon God's will alone, and not according to factors such as size of an army, training, or weapons, then why hasn't God given us victory over Israel and given himself a break from the incessant pleading and begging and supplications made every Friday from Minbars of mosques all over the world and repeated daily in houses and gatherings to give victory to the Muslims over the unbelievers, and to disperse their unity, and destroy their buildings, and make orphans of their children and make them and that which they possess as spoils for the Muslims? Those poor Friday Preachers; they have worn out their vocal chords, and their throats are dry and sore, yet God never replies. But that won't stop them.

The truth is that victory has its reasons and its causes. If they are present then it results in victory, whether God wills it or not. While, if they are not present, then neither one God nor fifty gods on top of that will be able to bring about victory. I wish I knew what is left for God to do when one army has all the necessary requirements for victory, while the other army has none. When the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, was God able to put out the fire like He did with the fire of Abraham that his enemies lit? God, Glory be His name, said: "We said, 'O, Fire! be thou cool, and (a means of) safety for Abraham!'" Was God not able to do that to the atomic bomb on Hiroshima? Or could God extinguish the inferno that Israel brought down upon us in southern Lebanon? Or continues to pour

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[208] Ain Jalut, was a battle between the Mamluks of Egypt and the Mongols in 1260 in the southeastern Galilee. It ended with a Mamluk victory and it was the first time the Mongols were decisively defeated. It marked the end of Mongol expansion into Islamic lands.

[209] The June War refers to the 1967 Six-Day Arab-Israeli war this ended in a decisive victory to Israel. The October war refers to the 1973 Arab-Israeli war. After initial advances by both Egypt and Syria, Israel pushed them back to Damascus in Syria and Suez in Egypt. The war ended with a UN brokered ceasefire. Egyptians celebrate this war as a victory, despite the fact they were pushed back by Israel. It did however cause some in Israel to conclude that they might not always dominate the Arab states militarily - particularly Egypt, and so it helped pave the way for peace negotiations between Israel & Egypt which saw the Sinai returned and Egypt's recognition of Israel.

down upon us in Gaza? No, of course not, for the story of Abraham and others like it are just legends and myths on paper. In reality, when the grand claims of the Qur'ān are put to the test, they are exposed as fake and fraudulent.[210]

The Jews in the Qur'ān have known since early times that any victory they achieve in any battle they wage in the path of God, the credit goes to God alone, or, at the very least, He takes most of credit. As for defeat, they deserve it and it is because of them alone. They are responsible for it because of what their hands have earned. It appears that hearing the sort of demoralising and self-defeating words that we have looked at has imprinted itself into their consciousness. For that reason, they refused Moses command to go and fight the giants in the Holy Land. They argued that, since victory is from God, then let God go and fight them. They have a point!

They despaired of fighting because, in almost all cases, it's a no-win situation that will backfire upon them alone, regardless of whether they are victorious or defeated, for they know how God works very well, since they are more experienced and have had a closer relationship with Him historically. For that reason, when Moses asked them to go into the Holy Land that God had decreed for them, they said:

"O, Moses! Lo! a giant people (dwell) therein, and lo! we go not in 'till they go forth from thence. When they go forth from thence, then we will enter (not 'till then). Then out spake two of those who feared (their Lord, men) unto whom Allah had been gracious: Enter in upon them by the gate, for if ye enter by it, lo! ye will be victorious. So put your trust (in Allah) if ye are indeed believers. They said: O, Moses! We will never enter (the land) while they are in it. So go thou and thy Lord and fight! We will sit here." (5:22-24)

Since God takes all the credit in a victory, especially seeing as these people are fearsome giants, then why bother fighting when the outcome is known in advance? That is the reasoning of the Jews in the Qur'ān. But as for we Arabs, we are not so clever nor experienced with God as the Jews. No, our only concern is pleasing God, and Jihad in His path, even though the only thing we reap from this Jihad is thin air. But we continue waging Jihad, no matter what the outcomes. We renounce all stake and desire for this world for the sake of victory or martyrdom!

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*God Crams Himself into Everything:*

God in the Qur'ān is the creator of everything; the cause of everything and the mover of everything. Nothing happens in this world without His will, His knowledge, and His permission. He interferes in everything, big or small, no matter how trivial. Despite the fact that so much in this world is a direct result of man's actions, God in the Qur'ān insists on cramming Himself into them. He constantly reminds us that the favour and blessing in everything is due to His mercy, permission, and will. There is no agent but He. No mover but He. He is the cause of causes. Nay, He is the only cause! The Conqueror of causes, the Disabler of causes, the Enabler of causes that don't cause causes or prevent the action of causes!

[210] I can't help thinking of the scene from "The Wizard of Oz" when Dorothy and her companions return having completed everything Oz demanded of them, (even though he didn't think they would.) They enter the presence of the Great & Powerful Oz, trembling and with their voices shaking ask him to fulfil the promises he made to them. At this point Oz starts to make excuses and says he has to think about it and they should come back tomorrow. But Dorothy insists he fulfil his part of the bargain, because they have fulfilled theirs. While this is going on her dog pulls the curtain away revealing that the Great & Powerful Oz is nothing more than a cheap con-artist. He does however tell them that they don't need to ask any Great & Powerful Being for anything, because the qualities they seek, they already possess and everything they have achieved is the result of their own intelligence, bravery and endeavour.

This is actually the doctrine of the Asharite[211] school in Islam. The greatest exponent of this doctrine was Hujjatu-l-Islam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali. Ghazali believed that God Almighty wills all things and plans all things. Nothing happens in the universe, whether few or plenty, small or big, good or evil, of benefit or harm, faith or disbelief, knowledge or denial, success or failure, increase or loss, obedience or disobedience, except that it is by His will, His decree, and His wisdom. Whatever He wills happens, and whatever He does not will doesn't happen. Not even the blink of an eye or a slip of the mind is outside His will. He is the one who begins and repeats. The doer of whatever He wants. Nothing can prevent His command and nothing stands in the way of His decree. There is no escape from His clasp, except by His grace and mercy. The servant cannot obey or disobey except by His will. If man and Jinn, angels and Shayaateen all got together in the world to make a single atom move or not move without His will, they will not be able to.

God's will in Ghazali's view encompasses the whole of creation entirely, from man, animal, plants, minerals and all the elements. Nothing can prevent His will, nor can any creature act outside of what His will has decreed. Everything in this world happens only because of His will, without any consideration to natural laws or requirements of cause and effect. God alone is the law of the universe: "He regulates affairs from the heaven to the earth." (32:5) He is the Subtle, the Open-handed. The ways are His ways, and the laws are His doing and His creation. He controls them according to His wisdom and He directs them as He wishes. This interference and presence in everything is blessing upon blessings, and a favour He bestows upon us so that He is close to us and we are close to Him: "And whatever favour is (bestowed) on you it is from God." (16:53)

God's blessings upon man are countless and limitless, and although they are restricted to a fortunate few while others are deprived, this is just by way of temptation and trial: "So that those who perish may perish after a clear proof (has been given), and those who live may live after a clear proof (has been given)." (8:42) For it is through patience in the face of adversity that one reveals the true mettle of man: "That We may test you so that We know those of you who strive and those who are patient." (47:31)

In the logic of religion, everything can be explained. Everything can be dressed up with fine words and captivating promises. It is often said that if God has denied anyone wealth, He has given him health and well-being in exchange. This is a magnificent blessing for which the blessed should thank He who blessed him, Glory be to Him. But I wish I knew what value this blessing has to those who live below substance level, and that is if it is actually true that they enjoy good health, never mind that this justification ignores those with sunken eyes, pale faces, and skin stuck to bones. If you find such people still alive, it's only because the death rate amongst them is so great that Sayiduna Azrael, peace be upon him, cannot respond quickly enough to all the requests, so (show) beautiful patience, for in a little while, God willing, Azrael will knock at every door of those left behind, sooner or later, and they will be transported to the Mighty Companion in the heavens. A little patience, and all the dreams will come true.

It is God—not diseases or germs—that cause life or death: "There is no God but He, who gives life and brings death, your Lord and the Lord of your forefathers." (44:8) It appears that sometimes God Himself directly brings death: "God it is that causes to die the souls at the time of their death." (39:42) Though, at other times, He delegates that to messengers or angels specialised in taking the souls of the servants: "Until when death comes to one of you, Our messengers cause him to die and they neglect not." (6:61)

[211] The Ash'arite school is a school of Kalam (theology) founded by Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari (d.936). It arose in opposition to Mu'tazilite Kalam and soon established itself as the dominant school of Kalam. Ash'arite doctrines came to be synonymous with mainstream, orthodox Sunni Islam. Modern day Salafis, however, are highly critical of Ash'arites. Note: This is a school of Kalam/theology and not to be confused with a school (Mathhab) of law - of which there are 4 main Sunni Mathhabs. Al-Ash'ari himself followed the Hanbali Mathhab.

The name "Azrael" doesn't appear in the Qur'ān. Instead, the words "angel of death" are used: "Say: the angel of death, who is given charge of you, shall cause you to die." (32:11) Assisting him in this arduous task, when the pressure gets too much for him, are other angels who thankfully share the work with him: "Those whom the angels cause to die in a good state, saying: Peace be on you." (16:32)

Just as God in the Qur'ān is the One who gives life and takes life, either directly Himself or by way of delegation, likewise it is He Himself who makes someone wealthy or poor, and not laws of cause and effect. He gives and withholds, and He is the mighty, the one who grants: "It is He who enriches and gives to hold." (53:48) It is He who makes people rich with wealth and gives them that which they take as acquisitions and treasure: "It is Allah that causes (you) want or plenty, and to Him shall be your return." (2:245) So there is no point in the striving of mankind, for sustenance has already been apportioned and struggle decreed, and God is behind every endeavour and purpose.

Nothing in this world, whether high or low, grows and extends or withers and fades, is celebrated or forgotten, is a nation that rises or falls, is mighty or humiliated, except that its fate rests upon the will of God and His decree: "And whomsoever We cause to live long, We reduce (him) to an abject state in constitution; do they not then understand?" (36:68) So He is the one who makes people live long and the one who makes them decrepit and bent-over. He gives kingdoms to those He wills and takes it away from who He wills, He makes who He wills mighty and strong and He abases and humbles who He wills: "Say: O, Allah, Master of the Kingdom! You give the kingdom to whomsoever You please and take away the kingdom from whomsoever You please, and You exalt whom You please and abase whomever You please. In Your hand is the good; Verily, You have power over all things." (3:26)

"And His are the ships sailing smoothly through the seas, lofty as mountains." (55:24) So it is He—not the ships or animals—that carry us along on land and sea: "And, surely, We have honoured the children of Adam, and We carry them in the land and the sea." (17:70) He carried us and our children: "And a Sign for them is that We bore their offspring in the laden ship." (36:41) It is God—not the wind, sails, nor oars—that make the ship go upon the water: "Your Lord is He Who speeds the ships for you in the sea that you may seek of His grace; surely He is ever Merciful to you." (17:66)

So if it is true that it is God who carries us on land and sea, then how come we fall or drown or suffer so many disasters? When I carry my son, I am not careless with him. I take utmost care not to expose him to danger. But God, it seems, doesn't take that care with us, and hurls us into dangers and disasters, sometimes in the name of testing us, and sometimes in the name of temptation, and sometimes in the name of what our hands earned. If we are fortunate enough to survive, then it is God who saved us. If we have one eye, then thank God He saved the other. If we are blind, thank God He saved the other senses. If we die, then "Every soul will taste of death." (3:185) Every time we suffer misfortune, God just showers us with promises of the hereafter and tells us to be patient. "And seek help through patience and prayer, and most surely it is a hard thing except for the humble ones." (2:45)

There's always an excuse, a justification, a get-out-clause, a promise, while He sits on His throne, watching in amusement and not lifting a finger. It is said to the polytheists while they are on the brink of the abyss: "Call upon your partners, so they call them, but they do not answer them." (28:64) And it is said to the believers while they struggle upon the waves of a stormy sea, "Who is it who answers the distressed one when he calls on Him, and removes the evil?" So they call upon Him, but He just ignores them, even though amongst them are women and children, old and the sick. Deafness in both cases, whether idols or the creator. Both groups (polytheists and believers) are abandoned by that which they worship. If not, then please enlighten me!

Just as God subjugated boats that travel on sea by His command—not by our command—likewise, He has subjugated animals for us: "(God), who has created pairs in all things and has made for you ships and cattle on which you ride, so that you may firmly sit on their backs, then remember the favour of your Lord when you are firmly seated thereon, and say: 'Glory be to Him, Who made this subservient to us, and we were not able to do it.'" (43:12-13)

God has created the animals not only so that we can ride them, but so that we can eat them and benefit from them in other ways: "Do they not see that We have created cattle for them, out of what Our hands have made, so they are their masters? And We have subjugated them to them, so some of them they have to ride upon, and some of them they eat. And they have (other) benefits from them (besides), and they get (milk) to drink. Will they not then be grateful?" (36:71-73) There are humans that eat insects, rats, cats, carrion, and snakes, so did God subjugate them for them also?

Ghazali mentioned in some of his writings that he knows of people who eat mud. So has this mud been subjugated for them? Or is it that God refuses to cede any ground to man except that He has to involve Himself in it and be the one who granted it as a favour to man? Even though man does not achieve what he achieves except after bitter experiences, long suffering, and painful trials and tribulations. How many people have died because they couldn't distinguish between that which is edible and that which is poisonous, between the beneficial and the toxic? As the saying goes, "Where some find harmful things, others find benefit." So in such cases, did God subjugate these things for man? Where is God when man makes a discovery? Is it the case that whenever man discovers benefits in something, God discovers a way to take the credit for its bestowal? Has it really been subjugated just for man? What about those who discover that something contains great harm? Doesn't all this just point to the fact that God in the Qur'ān refuses to recognise, nor want, nor tolerate that human endeavour be given any credit? It is as though man is His enemy rather than His "vicegerent" on Earth.

Even the sperm in a woman's uterus is not spared God's intrusion and interference. Without any consideration of the strength or weakness of the sperm, fertility or impotence or their enormous struggle in competition with the billions of other sperm to reach and fertilise the ovum, "He it is who begins and repeats, the Forgiving, the Loving, Owner of the majestic throne, Doer of all He wants." (85:14-15) So it is He alone that determines whether the child will be male or female according to His will, Glory be to Him: "He creates whatever He wants and bestows female to whomever He wants and bestows male to whomever He wants. Or He mingles them, males and females, and He makes barren whom He pleases. Lo! He is Knower, Powerful." (42:49-50) So male is male because God made it so and female is female because God made it so and the barren is barren because God wanted it so regardless of any biological or environmental factors that affect fertility and infertility.

Did he not grant Zakariya his son, Yahya, despite the fact that his wife was infertile? God simply cured her infertility and made her able to conceive:

*"And (remember) Zakariya, when he cried to his Lord: 'O, my Lord! leave me not childless, and Thou art the best of inheritors.' So We responded to him, and We granted him Yahya, We cured his wife's (barrenness) for him. These (three) were ever quick in emulation in good works; they used to call on Us with love and reverence, and humble themselves before Us."*

*(21:89-90)*

Nor was that restricted to only Zakariya, but, before that, God also responded to his friend, Ibrahim:

*"There came Our messengers to Abraham with glad tidings. They said, 'Peace!' He answered, 'Peace!' and hastened to entertain them with a roasted calf. But when he saw their hands went not towards the (meal), he felt some mistrust of them, and conceived a fear of them. They said: 'Fear not: we have been sent against the people of Lut.' And his wife was standing (there), and she laughed, but We gave her glad tidings of Isaac, and after him, of Jacob. She said, 'Alas for me! shall I bear a child, seeing I am an old woman, and my husband here is an old man? That would indeed be a wonderful thing!' They said, 'Dost thou wonder at Allah's decree? The grace of Allah and His blessings on you, O, ye people of the house! For He is indeed worthy of all praise, full of all glory!'"*

*(11:69-73)*

Indeed, God is able to do all things. But only in the past and in the tales of the ancients. Woe to that "good news," for it brought us the forces of evil. The friends of God and His beloved ones, the tribe of Israel!

Have you forgotten the rain? It is the greatest of God's gifts to his servants in this world. Since, without it, there would be no life at all, for there is no life without water: "And we made from water every living thing." (21:30) So, of course, God is going to stuff Himself here completely, no-holds-barred. As usual, and without any regard for natural laws, God sends rain down from the sky, not because warm moist air cools causing condensation and then rain, but because God has sent it down to wherever He wishes and to whomever He wishes and He withholds it from whomever He wishes. The universe is His universe; He controls everything, He has no partner in His dominion, nor (needs) He any to protect Him from humiliation[212].

Since God inserts Himself into the actions of man, and these are purposeful actions subject to man's own will, then, of course, you can be sure He is going to insert Himself into acts of nature: "It is He Who sends down water from the skies: with it We produce vegetation of all kinds. From some We produce green (foliage), out of which We produce grain, heaped up, out of the date-palm and its sheaths are clusters (of dates) hanging low and near: and gardens of grapes, and olives, and pomegranates, alike and unlike. Behold the fruit of it when it yields the fruit and the ripening of it; most surely there are signs in this for a people who believe." (6:99)

If it weren't for the fact that rain falls according to well-defined and observable natural laws governing how, when, and where there is moisture in the atmosphere and processes of evaporation, condensation, geography, and so on, then this might actually be an amazing sign. For example, if God made the rain fall in conditions that contradicted natural laws so that there were never droughts nor floods, but exactly the right amount of rain to make everywhere fertile and producing these fruits and crops for everyone, regardless of the lack of the correct geographical zone, weather, climate, soil, and other natural conditions, then yes, this would indeed be a great sign.[213]

But, as it is, it is no more a sign than saying God populates and makes desolate, saves and doesn't save, gives and takes life from—where is the sign in that? So rain doesn't fall according to natural laws but according to the will of God: "Do you not see that Allah sends down water from the sky, then makes it go along in the earth in springs,

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[212] Reference to Qur'ān: 17:111

[213] The Qur'ān repeatedly uses natural phenomena, like rain, as 'proof' of God. Yet God could have made rain happen without any discoverable natural laws. Instead he chose to make it subject to very precise and observable laws of nature so, for example, a desert region will get less rainfall than a temperate zone. Then after having made everything subject to these laws, God in the Qur'ān then points to them saying they are a 'sign' of God and that he controls them and sends them where he wants. Yet if God had really wanted to place rain and other phenomena directly under his control & as a 'sign' of God, he could have done that by making them happen miraculously whenever and wherever he wished with no observable natural laws at play. Why do it this way then claim they under his direct control and a 'sign' of his existence? The answer perhaps is that in ancient times man was not fully aware of the natural laws that governed the elements and so they would have seemed to be happening miraculously and under the direct control of God. Which is why natural phenomena were a very convincing argument for God in the past. Rain appeared to bring the desert magically to life rather than it being because of dormant seeds hidden in the sand, blown there by the wind. A tornado was seen as an act of an angry God rather than the collision of warm and cool air. Lightning was retribution from the heavens rather than an electrical discharge between a cloud and the ground. Despite the fact that we know better today, this argument is still used. It is the argument from design which put simply is; 'look at the amazing complex world around you, it must have been created by a very wise and very powerful creator.' Firstly even if the premise were true it certainly doesn't support the claims of any specific religion. Secondly, given how much bad and/or malevolent design there appears to be in the world, it is just as likely to have been designed by a committee of confused, flawed and/or wicked gods than a single, all-wise & all-powerful god. Also the fact that the world is complex and amazing only poses a question, it doesn't provide an answer. By arguing that it must have been created by a wise and powerful being only raises more questions. Where is this being? Why did he do it? Who created him? If he is uncreated then this answer is something that lies outside human logic and reason, in which case any answer can be postulated. The truth is that the there will always be things we don't understand, but that is not in itself proof of a God.

then brings forth therewith herbage of various colours, then it withers so that you see it becoming yellow, then He makes it dry up and crumble away? Most surely there is a reminder in this for the men of understanding." (39:21)

This is how He sends down the rain and brings forth fruit. He causes springs to gush forth, and He leads water to dry land: "Have they not seen how We lead the water to the barren land and therewith bring forth crops whereof their cattle eat, and they themselves? Will they not then see?" (32:27) Though he forgot to mention that he also leads the water to boggy swamps and shanty towns where the poorest of the poor and most wretched live, where the water God led there causes mud slides and ground collapses or sweeps away dwellings and drowns the weak and helpless. God forgot to mention how He keeps increasing the rain as rivers burst their banks and communities lose what little they had and countless lives are destroyed. God also forgot to mention that He withholds the rain in other places, causing a drought in a land where there is no grain heaped up nor pomegranates. Only listless shadows waiting for Azrael to take them to the happy place they have been promised.

If God does mention any of this, it is only by way of a stick and carrot. In this case, the destruction that rain brings is the result of what people's hands have earned, even though those who suffer from disasters caused by rain and floods are usually the poor, the weak, and the sick. As for the rich and strong, God rarely allows harm to touch them, no matter how much their hands have earned. They are His favourites, His cherished sons, His pampered ones. Like Israel, the spoilt daughter of America. The rest are just terrorists, and so we can ignore all the injustices. God must increase the hunger of the starving and increase the wealth of the fat cats.

This is the law of the jungle. The law that "might is right," whether in Heaven or on Earth. It's just the same, and may God help us! Let one group be happy and let another taste bitter fate, and don't let anyone stretch their eyes to what one group enjoys over another. Let one group accept their lot patiently, while the other hastens to fulfil their every desire, while God knows what is best for each group: "It may be that you dislike a thing while it is good for you, and it may be that you love a thing while it is bad for you, but Allah knows, while you do not know." (2:216) So poverty, disease, famine, stagnant open sewers in shanty towns are better for the inhabitants of these places. As for the others, "Step by step, We gradually lead them on from whence they know not." (7:182)

So the meaning of this is that God in the Qur'ān only speaks about the positive kind of "subjugation," which makes Him look good and paints Him as the benefactor and the one who grants favours upon us. As for the negative type of "subjugation," the one that brings harm and destruction, the Qur'ān never mentions it except when talking about testing man through trial and tribulation. Of course, God in the Qur'ān doesn't mention it since it is an argument against Him, not for Him. So, of course, He didn't bestow upon us the poisonous snakes, scorpions, malaria mosquitos, or fleas carrying plague, nor all the diseases, infections, bacteria and viruses, nor all the disasters and tragedies that are too many to count throughout history. No. Complete silence, like the silence of the dark.

However, even the latter (negative phenomena) can be explained away in the logic of religion using the usual way of whitewash and gloss in the books of tafseer and Sufi sayings. Defending them by inventing all sorts of justifications and profound wisdoms which lay behind them. So they are either a test and a trial, or the result of what people's hands earned, or expiation for sins and misdeeds, whose punishment is brought forward in this life so they can be paid for now in this life, so that one would not feel any fear as he goes over[214] the fire of Hell on his way to

[214] According to hadith there is a narrow bridge called Al-Sirat, that crosses over Hell, that must be crossed in order to reach paradise. Some will cross easily, but others will slip and fall into the fire below. Narrated by Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri: We, the companions of the Prophet said, "O Allah's Apostle! What is the bridge?' He said, "It is a slippery (bridge) on which there are clamps and (Hooks like) a thorny seed that is wide at one side and narrow at the other and has thorns with bent ends. Such a thorny seed is found in Najd and is called As-Sa'dan. Some of the believers will cross the bridge as quickly as the wink of an eye, some others as quick as lightning, a strong wind, fast horses or she-camels. So some will be safe without any harm; some will be safe after receiving some scratches, and some will fall down into Hell. The last person will cross by being dragged over the bridge." (Sahih Bukhari- Volume 9, Book 93, Number 532)

Paradise: "Not one of you but will pass over it." (19:71) So he who crosses safely crosses safely, and he who falls down falls down. May God protect us from it and make us of those who are saved and accepted. He is all-hearing, always-responding.

The powerful person is powerful because God granted him power, not because he applied the requirements of power. He, Glory to Him, is able to withdraw this power from him at any time if he falls into disobedience or strays from the straight path, and not when the person abandons the requirements of this power: "Do they not see how many a generation We have destroyed before them, whom We had established in the earth as We have not established you, for whom We poured out rain from the skies in abundance, and We made the rivers to flow beneath them, then We destroyed them on account of their sins and raised up after them another generation?" (6:6)

However, the truth is that God only grants power to the powerful (he who doesn't need to be granted power). God never gives power to the powerless. God establishes those who are established and ignores those in most desperate need. In other words, God does nothing. Why treat us like fools? He does that in order to claim a power that isn't His, and bestow a favour upon he who does not need Him to do so.

Look at the way He, Most high, crams Himself into an affair which, by the Qur'ān's own admission, was accomplished quite independently of Him, Glory be to Him: "God does not change the condition of a people until they change their own condition." (13:11) Does this mean that God will not change the people until after they change? So what is left for God to do, then? The only thing that is important is that God claims His fixed share, even in that which He has no share. If there is no share for Him, then He will pry it out by force, and what will be will be!

Stranger than this is that God created the stars for us to be guided by. We, who have existed only in the last five seconds of the life of the stars, measured by billions of years: "And He it is Who has made the stars for you that you may guide yourselves in the darkness of the land and the sea; truly We have detailed Our signs for people who know." (6:97) Were all these stars created just for man? Bearing in mind the naked eye can only see a small portion of the stars of our own galaxy, never mind all the stars of the countless galaxies that stretch beyond that even the most powerful ultraviolet and infrared telescopes can only glimpse a tiny fraction of. Each single star is a massive sun, many dwarfing our own sun.

If it truly is the case that God created all this just for man on this tiny planet that is just a speck in the vastness of space, then how dear must man be to God! How precious is he is. Thank you, God, for these stars that fill our bellies with food, that cure us from disease, that enable us to fulfil all our needs. They filled our lives with joy and wellbeing! "He gives you everything you ask Him for. If you try to count the favours of God, never will you be able to number them. Verily, man is very unjust and ungrateful." (14:34)

So Glory be to You, O Bestower of favours, Giver of good and blessings to all people and races and nations! All these stars that you created for us…do they satisfy hunger? Quench thirst? Remove oppression? Save the desperate? Shield one from evil? Would that you had bestowed on us something to satisfy hunger, or assuage thirst, and that you would bring justice instead of oppression! If not, then all these stars do not amount to a morsel of food in the mouth of the starving!

A tiny fraction of light, from a tiny fraction of stars reaches us, while beyond that there are suns we shall never see light up the surface of planets we will never know. Did God create all this for us? Why did God, Glory be to Him, choose this tiny grain of sand to single out for all His bounties and favours? Does that mean that the inhabitants of other planets, if there are any, will be deprived of the light of these stars that God made exclusively for our benefit

on Earth? In which case, how will these others guide themselves? And if we are one day able to reach one of these planets, will we be unable to guide ourselves by the stars that God made just for us on Earth? Or if we move to another planet, do we lose our right to be guided by these stars? Or will we be able to retain this right by virtue of the fact that we are expats: former Earth residents?

I only ask these questions so that we can get to the bottom of this, and would humbly seek the opinion of the experts in these matters to give us their opinion. I think it would be better if those experts be of a high level of research and study and combine the sciences of religion and the sciences of the world. Material sciences and spiritual sciences. May God make their footsteps firm and allow us to benefit from their baraka, for, indeed, He is the all-hearing, ever-answering!

Of course, the truth is that this verse merely depicts the ancient geocentric Ptolemaic cosmology current at the time. Rather than speaking in scientific terms, it is speaking in a poetic, mystical, and fanciful style. Its author has no idea of the limitless universe that is sprinkled with billions upon billions of galaxies and black holes. The universe, according to this verse, is a small canopy with Earth occupying its centre. The sun and other planets rotate around the earth, and the moon is one of these planets. One sun, one moon—that's the universe! As for the sky, it is just a roof sprinkled with stars to guide the people of the earth in the darkness of land and sea. This view of the universe is closed and narrow; it looks pleasing to those who behold, and satisfies them in their small world.

Just as God in the Qur'ān generously bestows upon us the gift of the stars, He also bestows upon us another amazing gift: the gift of lengthening shade. It is, of course, well-known that any tangible material body that is put in front of the sun, or any source of light, will leave a shadow. This shadow will vary in length depending on the position of the sun. This matter is very clear, and I don't think anyone will doubt it or need it explained to them. But, despite this, God in the Qur'ān turns it into a gift that requires gratitude from us, as though we are children who will believe everything that is said to us:

*"Have you not turned your vision to your Lord, how He extends the shade? And had He wished He could certainly have made it stationary; then We have made the sun an indication of it. Then we draw it in towards Ourselves, taking little by little."*

*(25:45-46)*

Notice the words, "had He wished He could certainly have made it stationary." Is that possible? If the shadow is stationary, that means the sun stops and is stationary, as it did for the prophet, peace be upon him, on the day of al-Isra' awl Mi'raj, when he was taken up to Heaven. In fact, as it also stopped for Joshua ibn Nun, according to what is related in the Torah, when the sun stopped and the universes stood still by the order issued by the creator of the universes!

If you have earned some money, don't you dare say that you own this money. The money is God's money which He has put you in charge of for a while. It is an amana (trust) around your neck, and damn all those who insult God by thinking differently to that. May God curse Qarun, who claimed that he had amassed his wealth by virtue of his own abilities, skills, and knowledge of the ways of good business and trade:

*"Surely Qarun was of the people of Moses; but he acted insolently towards them: such were the treasures We had bestowed on him that their very keys would have been a burden to a body of strong men. Behold, his people said to him: Do not celebrate, for Allah does not love those who celebrate (their riches). But seek, with the (wealth) which Allah has bestowed on you, the Home of the Hereafter, nor forget your portion in this world, and do good, as Allah has been good to you, and do not seek to make mischief in the land for Allah loves not those who do mischief. He said: This has been given to me because of a certain knowledge which I have. Did he not know that Allah had*

*destroyed, before him, (whole) generations, which were superior to him in strength and greater in the amount (of riches) they had collected? But the wicked are not called (immediately) to account for their sins."*

*(28:76-78)*

Did you see this insolence to God? Saying he earned his wealth through his own efforts and being happy about it? What a nerve! So what was the result? "So We caused the earth to swallow him and his house and he had no-one to help him against Allah, nor could he help himself." (28:81) But this land collapse that swallowed him up was not far-reaching. No, it was limited to only to the area around him and his house and did not extend beyond that. So the others there praised God and said gratefully, "Had it not been that Allah was gracious to us, He could have caused the earth to swallow us up!" (28:82) In this is a warning for those who reflect.

Similar to that, in the sense of undermining self-confidence and human ability and accusing man of rejecting divine bounty and gifts, is what is related in His saying, Most High, when He denounces mankind for being ungrateful for the mercy of his Lord after receiving it and having evil removed from him: "When We give him a taste of some mercy from Ourselves after some adversity has touched him, he is sure to say, 'This is due to me.'" (41:50) Yes, due to me! Meaning my hard work, my effort, and God has nothing to do with it. If it wasn't for my efforts, perseverance, striving, and my self-belief and my ability to act and affect things, and my reliance upon the law of cause and effect in order to deal with what faces me in life, my condition would never change. In fact, it would just get worse. By my life, I swear that denying me this is a blackmail I will not accept nor permit, for it seeks to rob me of my efforts, strip me of my initiative, and my ability to act and behave as I choose. My ability to think for myself and take a position on the events that surround me. Indeed, God in the Qur'ān wants to strip me of that which is most precious to me: my very being, my raison d'être!

If you live in a place, beware of saying that you yourself made it comfortable to live in or furnished it yourself, for it is God who is the landlord of your flat or house and He built and furnished it. You are just a tool in His hand to do with as He pleases. Whether it is a house made of bricks or a tent made of skins, "It is Allah Who made your habitations homes of rest and quiet for you; and made for you, out of the skins of animals, (tents for) dwellings, which ye find so light (and handy) when ye travel and when you pitch camp. And of their wool and their fur and their hair (He has given you) household stuff and a provision for a time." (16:80)

Do not suppose that cure from diseases is subject to the doctor and the medicine he prescribes for you. God is the one who cures. How wicked is the ill person who thinks that the doctor is the one who cures, for it is God who created us and guides us. He feeds us and gives us drink, and He cures us of illness and He causes us to die, then He brings us to life and we hope He will forgive our sins: "Who created me, and it is He Who guides me, Who gives me food and drink, and when I am sick, He heals me, Who will cause me to die, and then give me life, and Who, I hope, will forgive me my sins on the day of Judgment." (26:78-82) Just as, "In the Qur'ān is that which is a healing and a mercy to those who believe." (16:82) So then seek cures in their proper places if you are believers, with God and His mighty book, for He is the best of physicians!

"And when I am sick, He heals me." Is that true? Even posing such a question seems absurd. Just as God doesn't give victory except to the one who achieves victory himself, likewise He doesn't cure anyone except the one who can be cured. For no amount of Gods can cure a sick person whose illness is incurable, has no antidote and is beyond the ability of the experts, especially in those days. Did God cure Ibrahim[215], the son of His most beloved al-Mustafa (the chosen one), peace and blessings be upon him, whose eyes overflowed with tears as he looked upon his

[215] Ibrahim was Muhammad's son born to Maria al-Qibtiyya in 630. At the age of one and half, he became very ill and died.

son, his own flesh and blood, dying in his arms without God showing him any pity or consideration due to his prophethood? If he had recovered as many people do from common ailments, then revelation would have descended from heaven about it and it would have been one of His miracles that prove the truth of his prophethood.

What can I say? Was God able to remove the effect of the poison that the Jewish woman slipped him to see the truth of his prophethood, reasoning that if he was a true prophet of God, the poison wouldn't harm him, but if not then it will quicken death? Thus it was that poison was the reason for his last illness and death three years after, which occurred as its effects did not leave him. So who deserves to be cured more than a prophet who is challenged about his prophethood by enemies? But despite this, God, as He always does, did not lift a finger to silence the enemies or prevent their derision and ridicule of the one who speaks on His behalf!

If God had cured him, it would have been the miracle of miracles, and many "clear verses" would have been revealed about it. Likewise, if God had cured his son, Ibrahim, it could have been a great miracle and sign. Plus, it would have prevented the awful schism between the Sunnis and the Shia. There would be none of the bloody conflicts that we have suffered from for so long and continue to suffer from today causing the most severe crisis amongst Muslims. So praise be to God—no-one is praised about something bad other than He! The creator of the earth, and creator of the heavens!

If you want to be amazed, then marvel at the whale of Yunus (Jonah), upon him be peace: "And Yunus was most surely of the messengers. When he fled unto the laden ship and then drew lots and was of those rejected. Then the big fish did swallow him while he was blameworthy. But had it not been that he was of those who glorify (Us), he would certainly have remained in its belly until the Day when they are raised. But We cast him out onto the naked shore in a state of sickness." (37:139-145) I am not concerned with the main content of the verse, whether it talks about an actual historical incident or whether it is just a myth. I am only interested here in the words, "We cast him out," meaning "We threw him," even though the one that threw him was, in fact, the whale, unless the whale is no more than another pawn, not God. This is, by my life, the strangest example of God inserting Himself into that which has nothing to do with Him. The only important thing is that He must have a share—in fact, He has all the shares in everything that happens in this universe, He monopolises the shares and does not leave a single share for anyone else. As for us humans, we get no mention and no part in anything!

This is just a brief picture that I hope makes clear what I am getting at under the title, "God Crams Himself into Everything." God it is who gives life and takes life, He is the cause of riches and poverty. Nothing in this world rises nor falls, moves or is still, except by His doing and influence. He it is that carries us "on land and sea," and if aeroplanes were known at the time of the prophet, then He would have added "and by air." It is He who subjugated the animals so we can ride them and eat them. No woman can conceive except by His will, nor be barren except by His knowledge. Nor does the rain fall except by His doing. There is no power but His power. Nations do not rise except by His doing, but if you disobey and go against His command then don't blame anyone but yourself, for the One Who warns is free of blame.

So what does all this show us? Is there a denial of human endeavour greater than this? Is there anything that destroys personal initiative and invention more than this? Is mankind anything more than just chess pieces that God moves wherever He wills, like the winds and clouds that are under His control between Heaven and Earth?

God in the Qur'ān is not satisfied with stripping man of his industry and own efforts, but He also strips things from the natural laws that govern them. All of that is confined to God according to His will that controls and has power over everything, and in His hands are the reins of everything! There is no law in nature apart from the law

of His will. No action, apart from the action of His will: "And He is not to be questioned about what He does, they are to be questioned." (21:23)

Doesn't this just point to an absolute dictatorship, arbitrary and capricious in nature, rather than observable laws of nature and cause and effect? A dictatorship that has no basis to work by, no institutions by which to rein in the randomness, nor control the arbitrariness, that trim its nails and directs it on the right course.

As for that which comes in the Qur'ān that confirms man's ability to earn and make effort, that is only ever mentioned in connection to his responsibility for blameworthy and punishable acts that deserves retribution. As for deserving reward, man is never given credit for that, for no-one will enter Paradise due to his deeds—not even the prophet—but only as a favour from God due to His generosity. It is a blessing that He bestows upon man and that He can give to anyone He wants and withhold from whomever He wants: "Surely, He it is Who originates and reproduces, and He is the Forgiving, the Loving, Lord of the Throne of Glory, the Doer of whatever He wants." (85:13-16)

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*God is the Conqueror over His Slaves:*

This verse where the above title is taken from (6:61) is perhaps the truest of all verses, and corresponds most closely with God in the Qur'ān. In fact, perhaps the truest form of this description is the one that appears in the more emphatic format of al-Qahhar (القهار), meaning "the one who utterly conquers and forcefully subdues, humbles and suppresses." "Say: Allah is the Creator of all things: He is the One, the Mighty Conqueror." (13:16) This emphatic form is repeated six times in the Qur'ān.[216] As for the first verse (where it appears as al-Qahir القاهر), that is only repeated twice.[217] For that reason, the more emphatic form of completely conquering and forcefully subduing and suppressing is the one that most suits God and better expresses His nature.

Having said that, one should be cautious and wary, for the Qur'ān, as we shall see, is in love with over-overblown and intimidating language. It loves dramatising, generalizing, and exaggerating everything it talks about. This is one of the most important reasons for the huge gap between the God on paper, which is imposing, intimidating, and involved in everything that happens, and the reality of God on Earth, who is absent from everything, who never lifts a finger, and whose only concern is that we follow rules and perform rituals. It is within these boundaries that the image of God is formed in the Qur'ān.

"He is the Conqueror over His Slaves." (6:61) Amongst the essential elements of Qahr قهر (conquering, forceful subjugation), is domination, control, and imposing one's will by force. Woe to anyone who dares to challenge God's will, for there must be no debate, no discussion, and no opposition to God's orders. Just obey or burn.

Qahr means to conquer and coerce, absolute mastery and control by force. It is the overriding characteristic of God's relationship with man. He created us, so He has the right to be "The Conqueror" over us: "Say: 'Allah is the

[216] 12:39, 13:16, 14:48, 38:65, 39:4, 40:16.
[217] 6:18 & 61.

Creator of all things: He is the One, the Mighty Conqueror.'" (13:16) Indeed, God has alerted us and warned us of a terrible fate, so we cannot blame anyone but ourselves: "Say, 'I am only a warner, and there is no god save Allah, the One, the Mighty Conqueror.'" (38:65)

How severe is this Qahr: "On the Day when the earth shall be changed into a different earth, and the heavens (as well), and they shall come forth to Allah, the One, the Mighty Conqueror. You will see the guilty that Day bound together in chains, their clothes made of pitch[218] and the fire covering their faces, that Allah may requite each soul according to what it has earned, and, verily, Allah is swift in calling to account. Here is a message for mankind. Let them take warning from it, and let them know that He is One God, and let men of understanding take heed." (14:48-52)

There is no god but He, free from having a partner and son: "Had Allah wished to take to Himself a son, He could have chosen whomever He pleased from those He created, but Glory be to Him (He is above such things)! He is Allah, the One, the Mighty Conqueror." (39:4) Why not, when He is the Lord of the heavens and the earth: "Say: Who is the Lord and Sustainer of the heavens and the earth? Say: (It is) Allah. Say: Do ye then take as protectors other than Him, such as those who have no power to either benefit nor harm themselves? Say: Are the blind equal with those who see? Or the depths of darkness equal with light? Or do they assign to Allah partners who have created like He has created, so that the creation seemed similar to them? Say: Allah is the Creator of all things: He is the One, the Mighty Conqueror." (13:16)

Consult your heart and conscience: "Are many lords differing among themselves better, or The One, The Mighty Conqueror? Those whom you worship beside Him are just names which you have named, you and your fathers. God has sent down no authority for them. Judgment is only with God, Who has commanded that you worship none save Him. This is the right religion, but most men know not." (12:39-40)

So forceful subjugation is amongst the attributes of God, and, as we mentioned, it means "domination or control," (الهيمنة) and this is also one of God's attributes and "Al-Muhaymin" (المهيمن) is one of God's beautiful names: "He is Allah, besides Whom there is no god; the King, the Holy, the Peace, the Granter of security, the Dominant, the Controlling, the Mighty, the Compeller, the Arrogant, Glory be to God from that which they ascribe as partners." (59:23)

The justification for القهر (forceful subjugation) and الهيمنة (domination) is simply that He created us, and so can do as He pleases. He has warned us through hHis prophets and messengers, so we cannot blame anyone but ourselves. There is no controller but He, He has no partner, and to Him is the end of all. As for anyone else, they can't do anything, but He is able to do everything. There is no judgment but His judgment. No object of worship but Him, but most people don't know.

Another feature of القهر (forceful subjugation) and الهيمنة (domination) is denial of the other's rights. Denial of his right to be consulted, denial of his right to question or discuss, denial of his right to act or hold an opinion. The Qur'ān often does this by ridicule, mocking, or just simply by refraining from responding, as well as applying adjectives and descriptions that depreciate, belittle, discredit and criminalise him. It destroys his initiative and

[218] قطران is pitch or tar i.e. a very flammable sticky resin. I once had the misfortune to get a drop of hot tar from a log I was burning on to my skin. Although it was only a tiny drop and not as hot as it could have been, it still caused enormous pain and what made it worse was that it stuck to my skin and so my efforts to remove it only caused me more pain. I cannot imagine how painful it would be to be clothed completely in tar while being burnt in fire. No human being would inflict such terrible torture on another human being, apart from perhaps the most sadistic and most barbaric of tyrants.

enterprise, so that it becomes a lesson for those who take heed! He must accept everything that is dictated upon him either willingly or by force:

*"And [mention] when We raised the mountain above them as if it was a canopy and they were certain that it would fall upon them, [and Allah said], 'Take what We have given you with determination and remember what is in it that you might fear Allah.'"*

*(7:171)*

The narrative here is concerning the quarrelsome Jews who resisted Moses and resisted taking the covenant. So God raised the mountain up from its root over them as though it was a canopy or roof, until they were sure that it was going to fall upon them if they didn't accept the laws of the Torah. The mountain in this case is Mount Sinai: "And [recall] when We took your covenant, [O Children of Israel, to abide by the Torah] and We raised over you the mount, [saying], 'Take what We have given you with determination.' (2:63 and 93) He didn't leave them any option, despite the fact they were not convinced and had doubts about what had been revealed to them. They must believe, whether they like it or not!

Why should God insist on interfering in the personal matters of conscience that are amongst the most precious parts of a human being as a self-aware being? These should be amongst his natural rights. Moses did everything he could to guide them, but they did not follow, so God forced them to accept what Moses had brought them through threats, intimidation, and the point of a sword—or mountain, in this case. So is this considered to be "belief" in the eyes of God's law? What kind of belief is that worth, when they were forced to believe in such a way that we are not forced to now? Man must have his will crushed and his spirit snuffed out. If he doesn't want to enter the sheep enclosure with the other animals, he must be forced in.

Messengers were sent to the people of Noah, Ad, and Thamud and those that came after, with clear signs (irrefutable evidences, proofs and confirmation). Yet, they weren't convinced. In fact, they disbelieved in them, and that is their right. But God in the Qur'ān cannot tolerate the word "No." They must believe in the clear signs or lack of clear signs, no matter what! If not, then woe to them.

As for miracles, God bestows them on some of the messengers but withholds them from others. To Him belongs the authority, and He has power over all things. God in the Qur'ān not only failed Muhammad in that He did not grant him any miracles, but He also failed some of the previous prophets. Does that encourage people to believe? Or does such a selective and dictatorial approach imposed by force just create doubts? They disbelieved in their prophets, and, as a result of this disbelief, the disbelievers were destroyed and punished, even though the fault is not their fault. The fault lies with the shortcomings of the evidence:

*"Their messengers said: 'Is there doubt about Allah…' They said: 'You are nothing but mortals like us…bring us, therefore, some clear authority.' Their messengers said to them: 'We are nothing but mortals like yourselves, but Allah bestows (His) favours on whom He pleases of His servants, and we can't bring you an authority except by Allah's permission…certainly we must bear with patience your persecution of us, and on Allah should the reliant rely…' So their Lord revealed to them: Most certainly We will destroy the unjust."*
*(14:10-14)*

In such conditions, there is only one choice, and that is to bow to oppression and surrender your right to choose for yourself. "And your Lord creates whatever He wants and He chooses. They do not have the choice, Glory be to God above that which they ascribe." (28:68) Even though the context here refers to the polytheists, condemning them for their actions, that doesn't mean that its implication is confined to them only. On the contrary, it applies to

believers as well as unbelievers: "It is not for a believing man or a believing woman, when Allah and His messenger have decided a matter, that they should have any choice about their affair. And whoever disobeys Allah and His messenger has certainly strayed into clear error." (33:36)

This verse was revealed, as they say in Islamic terminology, concerning Zainab bint Jahsh, who was one of the noble women of Mecca, when the prophet forcibly married her to his ward, Zaid ibn Haritha. She rebelled against this marriage which God had imposed upon her by force without taking into account her feelings. The result was that this marriage failed miserably, despite the command having been revealed from Heaven, which, at that time, was the highest source of authority in the world. For that reason, the inevitable happened: divorce.

God does not cease warning the Muslims about going against that which He has chosen for them, even when that which He has chosen is bad for them and not in their interest, as we saw in the case of the previous verse. They must submit entirely and let God and His prophet be the judge in all their affairs: "But no, by the Lord, they do not believe! Until they make you the judge in all disputes between them." (4:65) But the matter doesn't end there—oh, no! They must also not even feel irritated or harbour reservations in that which God and his prophet decreed, for all that is haram—even your private thoughts and feelings about the matter are policed. For that reason, the verse continues by saying: "And then find in their souls no resistance against Your decisions, but accept them with the fullest conviction." By my life, this is the height of control and oppression. Is there after this oppression any more oppression? But then, amongst His "most beautiful names" is The Controller (المهيمن) and The Conqueror (القاهر)—nay, the Mighty Conqueror (القهار).

Absolute submission to "The Conqueror over His servants" and unconditional acquiescence to His control. His word is the law that must be carried out. There is no appeal against His decision and no overturning His sentence. There is no loss except upon the rejecters, and there are no miracles or magic: "Whoever turns away, then, indeed, Allah is the Free of need, the Praiseworthy." (60:6) That is the straight religion. "So whoever wills, let him believe, and whoever wills, let him disbelieve." (18:29) "As for those who believe, they know that it is the truth from their Lord." (2:26) "And Our punishment cannot be repelled from the people who are criminals." (12:110) So the common man and simple folk, especially the poor and helpless, respond to the call to Islam without question simply by just listening to the Qur'ān and hadith of the prophet.

But there remained a category that resisted, those who were obstinate and stubborn. For they had put their hand upon the point of weakness at which they could criticise Islam and its complete lack of miracles and the refusal of the prophet to produce any miracles apart from the miracle of the Qur'ān, even though it is a myth—one that has stolen the hearts of many great minds, as well lesser ones.

Yet, the skeptical opposition continued challenging the prophet. It doesn't want empty linguistic miracles. It insisted he brought real miracles from God that could verify his prophecy. Miracles like those of past prophets who were given miracles: the ones that the Qur'ān itself relates. They don't want a miracle of "word," but a miracle of "action." It appears that the prophet was troubled by this request, and it annoyed him every time they insisted upon him producing a miracle.[219]

God in the Qur'ān does not tolerate "the other," nor will He stand for any opposition from "the other," as we have seen. For the other is like a partner which negates the absolute oneness of God, Most High, even if this partner is a wife or a son. For a partner is an equal, and God does not want equals; He only wants slaves. He only created man and Jinn so that they would be slaves: "And I have not created Jinn and man except that they worship

[219] The amount of times this question is answered in different ways in the Qur'ān would certainly suggest it was a question that played on Muhammad's mind. For example: (28:48) (2:118) (2:145)(6:37)(6:109)(10:20) (13:7)(11:12) (13:27) (17:59)

Me." (51:56) This state of slavery is not confined to this world, but continues into the next life, also: "There is no one in the heavens and Earth but that he comes to the Most Merciful as a slave." (19:93) And here, God pours contempt upon this "other" who dares challenge Him.

God in the Qur'ān has a plan which He wants to impose by coercion. In other words, by force as far as possible. Woe be to anyone who refuses to bow His will! But blessed be "Those who listen to speech and follow the best of it." (39:18) This is the nature of eastern tyrants exactly! No discussion. No response to their objections. Total neglect of the needs of the people. Lavishly rewarding sycophants, while brutally repressing those who dare to question!

God in the Qur'ān cannot even tolerate questions from the angels. God's position is always the same, whether the one objecting is human or angel: ignore, mock, belittle, and refuse to respond, even if the objection has later proven to be correct: "Behold, thy Lord said to the angels: 'I will create a vicegerent on Earth.' They said: 'Wilt Thou place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood, whilst we do celebrate Thy praises and glorify Thy holy (name)?' He said: 'I know what ye know not.'" (2:30) He, Glory be to Him, just shut them up and did not reply to their question. Instead, He just said, "I know what you don't," even though events have since proven that all their fears were correct. It doesn't matter, for there is no questioning His wisdom. He is: "The doer of whatever He wants." (11:106 and 85:16) This is the reality of الهيمنة (domination or control) without whitewash, spin, nor twisting the truth, and this is the fact of القهر (forceful subjugation) without mincing words.

One of the strange things is that God in the Qur'ān is not accommodating to anyone in the way He is to Iblees. He allows him to debate and discuss with Him at great length in a way He didn't permit the angels to, even though they are close to Him. In fact, Iblees even puts forward a suggestion of his own, which is met with God's immediate approval, even though God warns him and those who follow him of the most dire consequences and most severe types of punishment:

*"When your Lord said to the angels, 'Surely, I am going to create a mortal from dust, so when I have made him complete and breathed into him of My spirit, then fall down making prostration to him.' And the angels did prostrate, all of them. But not Iblis: he was proud, and he was one of the unbelievers. He said, 'O, Iblis! what prevented you that you should prostrate to him, whom I created with My two hands? Are you proud, or are you of the exalted ones?' He said: 'I am better than he; Thou hast created me of fire, and him Thou didst create of dust.' He said: 'Then get out of it, for surely you are driven away, and surely My curse is on you to the Day of Judgment.' He said: 'My Lord! then respite me to the Day that they are raised.' He said: 'Surely, you are of the respited ones. 'Till the period of the time made known.' He said: 'Then, by Thy Might, I will surely make them live an evil life, all. Except Thine servants from among them, the purified ones.' He said: 'The truth then is and the truth do I speak: That I will most certainly fill Hell with you and with those among them who follow you, all.'"*

*(38:71-85)*

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*With God, man must stay within his limit:*

Remember your origins, O, mankind. Don't forget that you are from mud. Nay! You are from contemptible fluid: "Have We not created you from a despicable fluid?" (77:20) So don't get too big for your boots, because God doesn't need you! Know your place and stay within your limit, and know your bounds, "And do not go about in the land joyfully, for you will never cut through the earth and you will never reach the mountains in height." (17:37)

Why this demoralising? Why this crushing of ambition? Is this just because he said "No?" Yes, he "will never reach the mountains in height," but he has travelled through space. His spaceships have reached the outer edges of our solar system on their way to other stars. Doesn't this count as a great achievement? Or perhaps He, Most High, didn't know that this little upstart would one day storm His secret chamber in the heavens?

As for the "sealing"[220] and the "deafness" and "the veil," they caused such controversy between Islamic thinkers and were the basis of the division between the early scholars of kalam into Mu'tazilites and 'Ash'arites. And as for the accusations of being animals, planks of wood, cowards and filth and similar sorts of descriptions and accusations that the Qur'ān hurls at those who dare oppose it, they must not be taken literally.

There is no sealing and no compelling as Jahm ibn Safwan and his school believed. Firstly, these words come under the classification of God cramming Himself into everything in the typical style of the Qur'ān which limits cause and effect to God alone, who has no partner. Secondly, they are also a convenient way of dodging the objections of the skeptics, avoiding having to give a proper response to the opposition, and meeting their arguments and proofs with stronger ones.

In fact, most of the objections and demands of the polytheists were right, as we have seen more than once. This is something that the Qur'ān does not want to admit to its audience, so it described their skepticism and rejection as God placing a "seal" on their hearts and a "deafness" in their ears, and so on. But this wasn't enough, and so it hurls insults and abuse at them, calling them worst of creatures and worse than cattle, planks of wood and cowards. In fact, it describes them using extremely ugly language that does not befit the speech of God, not to mention that it is applied to human beings who, as the Qur'ān itself acknowledges, are His vicegerents on his earth. This word is "Filth."

They are the making of His own hands, so where did this filth come from? It's like those who don't have a proper response to their opponent and can only resort to bad language and insults. It is the last resort of the bankrupt, who have nothing else to offer other than a foul mouth instead, of displaying self-control, self-restraint, avoiding emotional outbursts and meeting reasoned argument with reasoned argument.

In order to hide these flaws, which are devoid of objectivity and common sense, and to conceal the inability to acknowledge the superiority of the other's argument and their sound reasoning, it was necessary to invent a supreme authority and absolute source being behind the objections and lack of belief that allowed them to be raised. They happened because of God's decree, which is aware of everything. The reason the unbelievers don't believe is because God sealed their hearts, and not because they had any good arguments or reasons. Nothing can overturn His judgment, and nothing can repel His command. Nothing escapes His will or eternal decree that precedes all things.

A big name, in the view of those who are taken by names, steals the limelight from the lesser name, no matter how good those other names are. In other words, what the Qur'ān relates in the way of evidence is not evidence, but

[220] The Qur'ān in several places states that God has set a seal over some people's hearts, placed deafness in some people's ears and a veil over some people's eyes. For example: (2:7) (6:25) It also throws insults at those who refuse to believe, for example: (98:6) (8:55) (7:179) (7:176) (63:4)

the fact it is attributed to God is sufficient to counter all evidence in the view of the believers. In fact, it completely destroys the substance of every other evidence.

In this way, it encourages the receiver to accept everything that is presented to him while encouraging him to disdain every conclusion it doesn't want him to draw. Otherwise, Muslims would not have remained fourteen centuries seriously and earnestly debating whether man in the Qur'ān is Musayyir (predestined) or Mukhayyir (able to choose freely) and what is the final position of the Qur'ān in respect of this endless whirlpool (the question of free-will and predestination).

Thus, attention and scrutiny was drawn away from the real motives and impulses[221] that lurk behind this whirlpool, and instead became fixated on the superficial and trivial matters that have distracted them from everything that is practical, positive and productive. It drowned them in the deep abyss of sterile questions and continuous empty wrangling amongst Azharite scholars that have neither point nor conclusion. After all that, are you surprised that until now they haven't reached a conclusion?

Or, to put it another way, the big question that the polytheists raised was: Why was the prophet unable to bring even one single miracle from amongst the many miracles that the Qur'ān itself claimed were bestowed upon previous prophets, and yet were denied to His chosen one, His beloved, the "Seal of the prophets," and chief of the messengers? They didn't believe that the Qur'ān was the great miracle of the prophet, despite the Qur'ān's challenge to them to bring the likes of it. They didn't deny the eloquence of the Qur'ān and the strength of its rhetoric, and they were, themselves, masters of eloquence and rhetoric, but it was not skillful words that would persuade them, at least in this matter. What would persuade them was skillful action, achievement, and miraculous deeds. They didn't ask for a linguistic miracle, even though they loved the art of fine speech, but not in a matter such as this. What they wanted was a real miracle, like those that the Qur'ān itself mentions were attributed to previous prophets, so as to remove their doubts and put an end to their questions.

One cannot produce the exact likeness of any great work of art, not just the Qur'ān. That is the nature of masterpieces. Great works cannot be imitated or replicated precisely. If they could, then they wouldn't be masterpieces. The great masterpieces throughout history have not been created by gods or prophets. On the contrary, they have been created by human beings who eat food and walk in markets. What am I saying? Although one cannot bring the same as these masterpieces, one certainly can bring something better than it. But the aura that surrounds a masterpiece always places it above human ability to imitate, and makes that which might actually be better than it an eyesore when placed beside it and of inferior status to it. That might not have been what the polytheists of Mecca actually said, but that is certainly what was in their mind during their struggle with Muhammad.

The problem with Islam, and perhaps its bad luck, is that it is the only one of the "divine" religions to appear in the light of history. It was enacted at a real time and place and cannot escape, not for one moment, from the course of real history. And, as we know, real history does not contain miracles or supernatural events. Such things remain the domain of myths and legends of pre-history. They belong to a distant past that accommodated that which history does not accommodate.

[221] The author is arguing that the real motive for the Qur'ān stating that God has misguided, sealed hearts, made ears deaf etc… has nothing to do with deep philosophical questions of free-will and predestination as Muslims later spent centuries debating, but simply due to Muhammad's desire to distract attention away from the valid objections of the polytheists and Jews who questioned and doubted Muhammad, by attributing their behaviour to God making them 'blind' to the truth, which meant their objections could be sidestepped rather than dealt with. The author is arguing that the great Muslim scholars - although possessed of great minds - were entranced by the belief the Qur'ān was God's word and so have not been able to examine Qur'ān with a critical eye as they would any other human text. Instead they became distracted with debates that attributed divine importance to the words rather than seeing the far more mundane, human reasons behind the words.

I am talking now from the position of the present, looking back at the past. I am speaking about this amazing, malleable time, this putty that can be shaped and moulded, this dough that hands can twist, bend, and flip over however they like. In this dough, there wasn't a difference between possible and impossible, between reasonable and unreasonable. The line between what was real and what was not real shifted about and was not fixed and stable.

In this flexible boundary, events shifted and the shapes they took were elaborated on and passed around. Don't ask about what these events were. This is where myths began, and on this fertile soil, legends blossomed. If you looked back there, you would see a world of myths, where there was no boundary between what was possible and what was impossible, between the reasonable and the unreasonable. Such was the age of miracles, overflowing with clear signs.

It is to this beautiful age, which took pride in visions and colourful myths, that the religions refer when they narrate to us the strangest of tales and most irrational of fables. They are its bread and butter, source of inspiration, and root of its attraction. No religion is free from such stories. For its pearls, every creed dives, each diver coming back with a precious catch. There is no law, no limit, no logic in the age of miracles. But everything changed with the age of Islam in so far as limits now appeared, and laws began to take their place in the universe, in logic and in minds.

Times changed and moved on. Thus, everything takes its place in the scheme of what's possible and whats impossible. And this is a fixed, immovable, and strict scheme that doesn't shift, whereas before, everything shifted in the ages of "anything-goes" and randomness which was subject to the whims of gods and their desires. But from now on, everything must submit to the laws of logic and reason and cannot escape from it after today.

Once, this seemed true: "His order if He wants something, say but 'be' and it is." (36:82) But when time moved on and changed, everything had to follow rules, and so they run by the order of God, the Creator of the universe. From now on, "Everything with Him is according to a fixed measure," (13:8 ) following, "The way or method (سنة) of God, and you will not find with God's way or method a change." (33:62) So no miracles after today. "And you will find no change to God's way or method." (35:43)

In conclusion, when the Qur'ān speaks of the seal on the heart and hearing and veil over the eyes, it has nothing to do with the question of free-will and predestination, similar to when it applies the most ugly of accusations to opponents and describes them using adjectives which reveal a lack of objectivity and also a vengeful and emotional reaction to criticism that has hit a nerve, which I thought the Qur'ān would be above in terms of using such language to describe opponents.

But all that is just a secondary and an unintended outcome. What was intended was to turn attention away from the merits of the opponents arguments and the strength of their opposition in comparison to the stance of the Qur'ān, which was less than expected, in an attempt to surround and contain these stubborn opponents before their danger spreads. This was in order to create a smokescreen around them so they can't see and they can't be seen by others. The most important thing is to shut them up in whatever way possible, for the wood is still green and the plant is still fresh and any damage could make it wilt and die. For most fires are started from small sparks!

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*An Ineffective God:*

Everything that occurs to your mind: that is what God is not! It's not true that God created Adam in His image and His likeness as the Torah says[222], for if he was then he would not be a wolf walking on the earth, or at the least, a pig delighting in dirt and filth. Instead, he would be an angel, hovering in the sky and taking his place in Paradise wherever he wishes. In fact, it is more appropriate to say that man created God in his image and likeness and then, since the beginning of creation, attributed descriptions and actions to Him that should never have been ascribed to Him in any way at all. On the contrary, He must be entirely freed and cleansed of such anthropomorphisms. God is not a Muslim, nor a Christian, nor a Jew. These religions are our religions. They are of our making, and they have been created according to our limits and flaws. God has nothing to do with any of them.

God is a concept, and, like all concepts, it is a creation of the human mind and the product of human consciousness that seeks to explain how he and the world came into being, to explain its causes and sources. Likewise, religion is a concept that man invented as a result of contemplation on his life as an individual and within his society, and as a result of contemplating his mortality and what lies beyond death.

This is incidental to whether there actually is a god or not or whether religion is true or not. Man has a need to assert himself and function freely and resourcefully without allowing any outside force, whatever it may be, to steal or rob him of his will. Nor allow anything to come between him and achieving the purpose of his existence.

In my opinion, I think we do God a great injustice if we perceive him the way the Qur'ān presents him: boiling with fury one moment, content and well-pleased another, and then angry and enraged again, just like a human being. If it is true that there really is a God, and it is something I cannot totally discount, then would that I knew where he is! I wonder where could he be. If it's not possible to answer this question, which I shouldn't even ask, then where is the evidence for God?

Not one person has seen God or heard his voice. Not one of the founders of modern science has come across any evidence of God. If anyone does make such a claim, it is only an opinion and a theory—and opinions are just opinions. They only apply to the one who holds them, and even then they may change their minds later. Opinion is the seat of dispute, as al-Ghazali says.[223] However, science is about testable evidence that can be independently confirmed and corroborated, or disproven and rejected. If God had wanted, he could have made his existence abundantly clear, testable, and provable.

Why does God hide from us and then make it compulsory that we believe in him? Why does he threaten those who don't confirm that he exists with doom, destruction, and terrible calamities? The truth is that it is the vulnerability of human nature, the rumination of the mind and flights of imagination that have created the concept of God. In early times, this concept had a ring of truth, if not more. How terrifying, ugly, and cruel the world was without God. How weak and helpless man was without God.

If the world wasn't brimming with gods, angels, and supernatural beings to help us and give us meaning and destiny, then there was no meaning to life at all. In this case, the world would just be a ghastly prison—no, a terrifying grave. Myth and reality, religion and magic were all one and the same and indistinguishable to early man, who performed rituals or offered sacrifices to appease gods and win their favour in the battle to survive. These myths and

[222] Genesis 1:27
[223] "Deliverance from Error" Al-Ghazali, p.90.

gods all had one origin: they all came from the same source, and that is the human mind. This amazing organ was our best advantage in this fearsome and brutal world. It enables us to develop intelligence and conscious awareness of our own existence, and it helped us make sense of what we saw around us and plan ahead. It is the growth and evolution of the human brain that has made us the inquisitive and curious creatures that we are. It gives us our desire to understand and to search for meaning and truth in every place possible. It is the hero of this cosmic novel in which the story of man unfolds, and it plays the key role.

Most people believe that faith in God is a psychological need, a primeval instinct and intuition that cannot be doubted. The odd thing is that the Qur'ān also is swept along by this claim, and seeks to firmly entrench it as far as it can: "Is there doubt about God, the creator of the heavens and the earth?: (14:10) But in our opinion, this belief is questionable, because if knowledge of God was instinctive and intuitive, deeply-rooted in our nafs (being/soul) by fitrah (the disposition we were created with) and nature, then there would be no need for proof to establish God's existence. No-one would deny his existence, just as no one denies any other natural instincts.

There may or may not be a God, and he may have created this world. However, that doesn't change the fact that it is up to mankind to take on the responsibility for the world himself and to have the courage to step forward and occupy his place at the seat of the world. His mind is the most effective weapon in the battle for existence when things become difficult. The centrality of God that religions never cease to inculcate into our minds has been transformed, by the reality of the challenges of our age, into the centrality of man.

What a lot of "proofs" and "evidences" are produced for the existence of God, yet how insubstantial and anecdotal they are! For example, one story that is mentioned is of a person who had a debt and was having difficulty in repaying it, so he sought solace at the tomb of the pious saint, Muhammad ibn Ja'far al-Husayni, and there he recited some Qur'ān and mentioned his debt, then began to cry bitterly and complained to God about his lack of means and the indignity of his position compared to others. A woman overheard him, and so gave him a gold necklace, saying, "Take this necklace for the sake of the one who is in this tomb." So he accepted it and left. But he had only gone a few steps when the creditor appeared, coming towards him. When he saw him he smiled to his face and said, "Return the woman's necklace to her, for I have more right to the reward and thawab (by cancelling your debt)." When he asked him about the reason for that and who told him about it, he said, "I saw the one who lies in this tomb, the goodly friend of God, and he promised me a palace in paradise if I cancelled your debt!" God singled out this pious man to bestow upon him this miracle, through which he fulfilled his debt for him and it was a sign that secured his debt and his faith in his Lord.

Have you forgotten the old woman who marvelled at how philosophers can spend all their lives in composing book after book to prove the existence of God? So she said, "By God! This spindle of mine is proof of His existence as the droppings are proof of the camel." From this comes the common saying, "O, God, give me faith like the faith of old people!"

Most people's faith in God is like this. It is founded on hunches, feelings, and emotions—nothing more than that. Even moving music can stir some sort of feeling that evokes a profound sense of the One, the Only, and deep meditation on the musicality of God's universe. From that, Sir Thomas Browne makes the leap to claim that there is always something of the divine in music that is greater than the ear can discover.

All the evidence for the existence of God is of this nature, varying only in degrees from the asinine to the astute. Perhaps the greatest of these are the proofs put forward by Aristotle. However, they all have one thing in common: they start with the premise that God exists, and then seek to find evidence of his existence. But, by my life, these proofs and arguments are deficient, because the mind that is willing and compliant can be led in any direction.

What is it they use to prove the existence of God? The existence of nature. The natural order in it. The sky and the birds. The oceans and its fishes. No doubt, these "proofs" have a value with those who are already convinced, but what value are they to those not already convinced? Zero! For no-one but those whose hearts already have faith will believe in them. As for those who don't, they won't find them to be anything other than houses more flimsy than the house of the spider.

Show me one sign of the signs of God, or any act of his acts that reveals the agency and effectiveness of God today, just like it appeared in the past. Just like this agency and effectiveness were manifested clearly in the past on the fire that was set ablaze to burn Ibrahim so it lost its ability to burn, or when he suspended the laws of gravity concerning Sulayman when the wind was put under his command, carrying him to wherever he wanted, a month's journey in a morning, then another month's journey back in an afternoon.[224] Or when he subjugated the birds to him, the Hoopoe bird which informed him about Bilqis and her people who used to worship the sun and moon instead of God. But today…where is all this?

The agency and effectiveness of God can be seen in the way he saves the despairing, defends the oppressed, feeds the starving, quenches the thirsty, heals the sick, and answers the prayers of the bereaved, orphans and widows when they lose all hope in life. What has God given to them apart from urging patience and sufferance!?

Earthquakes and floods were announced in the past. They only happened after a clear warning to the people of the area that God is going to bring destruction down, while evacuating the pious servants of God, before sweeping away the wrong doers and destroying the sinful transgressors, the unbelieving enemies of God, just as happened to the people of Lot and his wife. God saved Lot and those who were with him and destroyed the rest. Here, we clearly see the action and effectiveness of God. Or is that just an ancient myth?

Where is God when it comes to today's acts of oppression and aggression? It is often said this is the responsibility of man alone! What has God got to do with it? By my life, this is a word of truth, even though falsehood is intended. So what does God do then? He doesn't do anything. Here is God's vicar on Earth, the pinnacle of his creation, which he formed with his hand, writhing from hunger pangs, lying in the dirt, abandoned to disease, poverty, hunger, plunder, looting and aggression, like dogs, flies and pigs.

If it is true that repelling oppression, aggression, looting, and pillage is man's responsibility, then what about if the person is a child or sick or infirm, too weak to bear any responsibility? Are they to be abandoned also, and left to the wolves and snakes? What is their crime?

God in the past—and only in the past—used to interfere in everything. Nothing was outside his will. Every case was dealt with individually and thoroughly, as we have seen in the story of Lot and Ibrahim. So what's the matter with him today? Why is it only in this day and age that God stands with his hands tied in the face of appalling tyranny and injustice, as though none of this concerns him?

Tell me, is this really effectiveness at all? Effectiveness is not something manifested in the natural pattern and continuous course, but in that which breaks that pattern and cuts that course. If not, then it is not effectiveness. It is omission, inactivity, stillness like the stillness of graves.

Just like God was the hero of heroes in the past, likewise he is in the future. But not in the foreseeable future on this earth nor in this life, but an unseen future in the next life. As for the present time, no, and a thousand times, no: "Had it not been that a word had gone forth before from thy Lord, the matter would have been decided between

[224] See Qur'ān 21:81 & 34:12

them, but they are in suspicious doubt concerning it." (11:110)[225] Just threats upon threats are poured down upon this wretched creature who is described as the best of creation!

So if God doesn't fulfill his promise to aid the oppressed and needy from amongst his faithful servants, as he pledged in the Qur'ān and challenged other gods to do, and if God fails to answer any request, and brings neither benefit nor harm to anyone, then where is his divinity?

Is it manifested in nature rather than people? Did he create mankind for nature? Or nature for man? Enlighten me if you know. Is the evidence of God's effect, if he has an effect, revealed in nature instead of people? That is if it's true that what occurs in nature (whose causes are part of nature itself) needs a mover. Or what exists (whose existence is part of its reality) truly needs an author. In other words, if it's true that nature reveals the action of God even though we only observe the cause and effect of nature itself, and the more we learn about the universe, the more the evidence for God shrinks until we are only left with a first mover, if such a thing is necessary.

The victorious does not require anyone to help him gain victory as we saw previously, yet, despite this, God in the Qur'ān attributes it to himself. Likewise, that which exists does not need someone to bring it into existence. Nor does that which moves need a mover, even though God attributes to himself the quality of creator and mover.

In the Qur'ān, God has absolute effectiveness, but in practice on Earth he has no effect. They say he is power. If this is true, then he is a negative, non-functioning power, if such a thing is possible. He is power in name only, with no substance to him. Put simply, he is an ineffective God. His power and effect is no effect. He is inaction and ineffectiveness, just like the aether that ancient and medieval physics used to think filled the universe.

This doesn't mean that God doesn't exist. In fact, I lean towards the belief that there is a God, though by way of inner feeling rather than by way of reason and logic, for they are of no use when it comes to this matter. At the same time, I am still beset by many doubts about his existence, for the evidence of inner feelings and intuition means nothing, even though in the language of the heart and emotions, they mean everything. For they fill a gap. They offer hope that the mind cannot.

Has God died? This is the question Nietzsche posed in the late 19th century, albeit in another context. For God had been the centre and focal point of the universe throughout the long history of mankind. But, as of now, the centre should change to man. Man should be reinstated to his original role and be entrusted with the responsibility of managing affairs on Earth. The most convenient ways should be sought to achieve the aim of human management of the world in a broad, secular, liberal sense; not in a religious sense that is sunk in service to God and his worship.

This is what was meant by the "death of God," which has become synonymous with individualism and rationalism, which was a feature of the emancipation movements in the West. However, it doesn't cancel out God as much as it returned him to his human origin, announcing the birth of the new individual who became a god. The dignity of man was, since the beginning, the first slogan and aim of the renaissance in Europe, or so it seemed for the supporters of contemporary humanism, including, for example, Luc Ferry, who put forward a very strident form of humanism that sanctifies man and regards him as possessing that which is more noble than blind nature and is above the value of life.[226]

Amongst the most dangerous things that this humanism is susceptible to is its extreme unruly ambition that empties it of all content. For, in the name of scientific, humanistic individualism, we almost went from humanism

[225] See: Sura Fussilat 41:45, Sura Yunus 10:19, Ta Ha 20:129, Sura Saffat 37:171, Sura al-Shura 42:14.
[226] Luc Ferry, Transmettre l'histoire de la philosophie, in Le monde de l'Eduction, Janvier, 1957.

without a god to humanism without man! Like we almost went from Nietzsche's declaration that "God is dead to a call for the glorification of man. If we had continued down this road until its furthest end, our journey would have ended, sooner or later, in the "death of man" himself, in a callous technocracy with a tendency towards positivism disguised as structuralism! In the end, nothing of man would remain but a puppet that the structures place on stage. That, by my life, is the most terrible end and most evil outcome.

In conclusion, I say:

We have no need for a humiliating and demeaning reliance upon some God in order to obtain our sustenance and enjoy the beauty and joys of this lifw. What need do we have for an ineffective God that neither harms nor benefits, and does not help us at all in a world full of wild animals and wolves, not to mention the brutal elements of nature? What does God do for His "Vicar on Earth?" What has this brought upon man apart from misery and grief? Has it ever undone an injury or rectified a misfortune? Protected him from oppression that surrounds him? Answered a single request? Saved a single starving child before death overtook him? All that it has given man are plenty of promises for the next life, related in the "divine" books that promise everything after having deprived him of everything in this life.

If we didn't live in a world of illusions, then the illusion of illusions wouldn't have ingrained itself so deeply in us, and that chief of illusions is the illusion of the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate, the Loving, giving God who will alleviate all grief, relieve all anguish, and banish all sadness. He answers the distressed when he calls on Him, heals the troubled and tortured, the weak and the lost. You cannot count His blessings, nor can the mind or the tongue number His bounty to man.

They gave him rule over them, so he ruled as a tyrant. They wanted him to be a predator, but he made them his prey.[227]

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## Epilogue

In conclusion, I remind the reader that the books of tafseer contain a great deal of meaningless waffle that is not worth the ink it was written with. The imaginative skills of the exegetes overflowed into these books and they plunged deep into the murky depths of speculation and fantasy that knows no limit. Every time they ventured in it,

[227] A line from a poem by Khalil Gibran

they were thrown to a distant shore. They did not leave any detail, big or small, but explained it, sometimes with ingenuity and sometimes with absurdity.

For hundreds of years, they have applied their intellect and skills to making the Qur'ān say what it doesn't say. They gave one word a thousand meanings, and discovered it has a thousand wisdoms. They invented for it a thousand eloquent features and recounted a thousand persuasive explanations. In fact, they invented a thousand new categories of eloquence and beauty that have never occurred to the creator of the universe. The result of all this is nonsense upon nonsense.

Yes, the books of tafseer are packed full of waffle, absurdity, folly, myths, and the scent of incense. They have explanations for everything that cannot be explained. There is no textual criticism. No application of reason in an unfettered and objective manner. On the contrary, it is unceasing defence, total enslavement, and idolisation. Blind prostration that reveals the extent of human incapacity and inability in front of the text.

The text either bequeaths man a state of feeble-mindedness, blindness, stupor, and inertia, where he dissolves in it and perishes in its branches so that it overtakes his whole person and he becomes its hands and legs, or it stirs within him feelings of questioning and challenge, self-respect and defiance. So he studies it and examines it and criticises it until there are ruins where once stood a citadel.

People in this respect are between the villainous and the noble, and the many shades between them. Look at how al-Ghazali diligently argues his case using reason and logic, but then soon loses his senses and melts emotionally when he is talking about the Hoopoe bird of Sulayman, or the camel of Salih, or the people of Gog and Magog...

The Qur'ānic commentators are masters of pontificating and padding. They do not know the true meaning of textual analysis and criticism. Whether they are the commentators of the classical period or the modern period, they are the same. Their overriding concern is to defend and justify the text, and they resort to obfuscation, equivocation, and sophistry whenever needed. If they do demonstrate a willingness to criticise the text, it is a very specific and directed type of criticism whose results are known in advance: on the surface it is criticism, but underneath it is to protect and insulate the text from every evil.

They think that by taking such a position they are doing good, and don't realise that, by doing this, they are abusing the text which they surround with faith. Worse than that is that after they pour into the text all their fairytales and all that they posses of wild opinions and sophistry, they then hasten to apologise, saying, "God knows best." They don't want to acknowledge their ignorance, while, at the same time, they don't want to say about God that which they don't know. So they get out by using this curious and amusing compromise: "God knows best!"

Despite the fact that textual criticism has become a branch of scholarship in its own right, we still mostly see the preaching, justificatory character in all our efforts in this respect. Scholars are still only interested in highlighting the eloquence of the text, the various types of rhetorical devices, and underlying wisdoms hidden in it. But none of them mention the many vacuous, meaningless, ambiguous, contradictory and flawed passages that abound in the text!

Oh, how numerous are the explorers of the Qur'ān, and how great are the efforts they expend investigating it inside out. Yet, how trivial are the results that they arrive at after such long devoting and dedication. What a waste of life! Oh, how many students of nonsense! For if it wasn't for the students of nonsense and the whole field of exegesis with its profitless merchandise, then the vacuous and narrow-minded peddlers of hot air, who live off the foolishness of the reader, would not be able to puff up and swagger about with pride! The full heads of corn bow in humility, while the empty heads are proudly lifted high!

There is collusion between the writer and the reader. The former throws out nonsense, and the latter swallows it up, and one completes the other. Oh, my grief over a life spent engaged in nonsense!

Thus, the commentators, theologians, and linguists never failed to justify the flaws in the Qur'ān, or to create escape routes by patching, fabricating, chicanery, sophism, and forcing the words to say that which they do not. Sometimes, they did that with sincerity and good faith, while, at other times, they did it with dexterity, ingenuity, and to outwit their contemporaries. They firmly believed they were doing good to the Qur'ān, and they never for a second doubted the Qur'ān was infallible. Whenever they found something that contradicted reason, science, or logic, they denied reason, science, and logic in order to confirm the Qur'ān was right. They would question their understanding and ability to grasp the meaning fully, but never for a second would they dare question the Qur'ān. They filled the void between reason and the Qur'ān with speculations and conjectures and myths and subtle points of eloquence…so that the Qur'ān, in their hands, became another Qur'ān!

In this way, they rescued the Qur'ān from many of the pitfalls, even though they never admitted they were pitfalls. They were only pitfalls according to their limited understanding and flawed reasoning; they are really fonts of wisdom. For that reason, they searched for this supposed wisdom. Every diver came back with a new pearl. Like this, they filled-in, repaired, corrected, hid, revealed, and masked until every verse in the Qur'ān had become a hidden gem that overflows with science and wisdom. They thank God for opening their eyes to these treasures, who generously bestowed upon them these inspirations: "That is the bounty of God; he gives it to whomever he wishes, and God is the possessor of great bounty." (57:21)

In these pages, I have described and reported what I have found in the Qur'ān and experienced myself. In my hand are just the tools to probe, weigh, measure, photograph, and record. I am not here to rectify. I am only here to describe and report. It may be that my pen unintentionally erred sometimes and I did not use the right words.

What can we do when the winds have taken us to where we did not intend or hope? It is not possible to correct something without describing the problem first so that one can understand its true nature and essence in order to prepare the way to bring about the necessary change in it.

The first step is always the most difficult of steps. All the following steps rely on it, so do not become nervous, waver, or slip. It is an extremely important thing, but it is important for the sake of your well-being, health and happiness, that you don't be apprehensive, lose focus, or concentration. It is a matter that will bring you comfort, but comfort for the sake of your humanity, aspirations, ambitions, and endeavours towards something better and more noble.

A person's mind is under his control, as mentioned previously. So choose what is good for yourself. There is nothing more indicative of the absurdity of life and the comedy of existence than the fact that those who make their own choices and seize the moment are few and rare. They are generally the leaders, explorers, innovators, the great men who changed the destiny of man while the rest of mankind are the herd that throng together. The rest choose the easiest, laziest, and safest option. They live in fear of life, and so die having never lived.

Have you seen how the law of absurdity struts about so that it alone dominates everything? It seeks to invalidate the mind and undermine the law of reason. It wants to extinguish the light of reason. But reason will spread its light, even if the ignorant hate it. It wishes to kill the young bud. But this bud refuses to die, and will grow and become mighty, and this is a momentous thing!

The worst thing is that a man feels that he should not be feel apprehensive, for if he is, then he is not a man. A man who is not apprehensive is more like a beast or a piece of stone. So be apprehensive, but don't be afraid. You are on the straight path. So beware of straying or deviating from it.

Damn existence if it doesn't stir emotions of awe, wonder, and astonishment when confronted by the universe in front of him. If it doesn't stir man to snatch the spark that spits from the raging furnace of the universe, so that the flame scorches him and he becomes branded with the fire of existence. Only then will he be able to approach that mysterious region of creativity where meanings swarm around and the waterfall of life flows over him. Only then will existence inspire him with its truths. Only by taking that risk, by allowing the music of the universe to shake his soul, for he who does not wish to feel life when he is alive is one in whose heart is a sickness and who has forgotten what life is. He is nothing more than part of the flock—no, he is worse than that. He is a stone pillar that does not feel nor move.